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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

A DUTCH TALE TOLD IN ENGLISH.

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH."



IN THREE VOLUMES.

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AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISTAKES AND MISHAPS OF KAREL DONSELAAR.

"IT is perfectly impossible," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "perfectly preposterous. It appears to me, woman, that your head has become confused by the exciting incidents you have witnessed, and that you now see a repetition of the scandal wherever you look. Such things are not unusual. I was reading only the other day of a similar case in the paper. Wait a moment, and I will see whether I can find it."

He got up and began a diligent search among a pile of old newspapers. Perhaps he was not sorry to hide his agitation.

“Do you mean, mynheer,” queried Betje, even redder in the face than usual, “that I have fancied the whole thing to myself? Oh dear, no; I haven’t that gift of imagination. I only wish I had, and I could earn more by writing the stories in the paper that they give so much money for than I can by being Miss Varelkamp’s servant. Not that I object to my service. And not that I should like to make up stories, mynheer, however much I was paid for them, which is wicked, and lies, and of the devil, who is the father of lies. No, I never made up a story since I was a little girl, and said that the baker was going to marry our neighbour’s daughter, and my dear mother spanked me, and I bless her for it in her grave. No, you

won't find me inventing anything, Mynheer van Donselaar, and I don't know, I'm sure, how people can manage to think of things they haven't seen. I've always trusted my eyes and ears, and, except what they've told me during the forty years of my earthly pilgrimage, I know nothing, nor I don't want to, thank Heaven."

Mynheer van Donselaar had not been listening. He turned away from his meaningless search for the newspaper and resumed his seat in the round armchair by his writing-table.

"Sit down, woman!" he said, speaking harshly in his agitation. "Sit down—What's-
yer-name!"

"I was christened Elisabeth Overdenboogaardsloot, mynheer," said Betje with much dignity, folding her red hands under her woollen shawl, "after my grandmother, who was a most God-fearing woman, and

could read her Bible without spectacles at the age of eighty-nine."

Under ordinary circumstances, this information would have exceedingly interested Mynheer van Donselaar, for he had recently begun collecting facts which related to cases of longevity, and a curious olla podrida such old gentlemen do get together when they once begin to cut scraps out of the newspapers and to interrogate workpeople in the streets.

But at the present moment he had other things to think of. He even forgot that he had ordered his head-gardener to come to him at nine o'clock precisely, and that it was already two minutes past.

"And you mean to tell me," he said impressively, "that you accuse my son of unseemly familiarity with a servant-girl of this village?"

There came a knock at the door as he was

speaking. In answer to mynheer's impatient, "Come in," the gardener made his appearance.

"What is it?" said mynheer.

The man could hardly believe his ears. Never in all Mynheer van Donselaar's methodical life had such a question seemed possible.

"You ordered me to come, mynheer," he stammered.

"Go to the devil," cried the poor Paragon. "I mean, another time. Come again another time."

"How late, mynheer?" asked the man, alarmed, yet clinging to the one idea which ruled that orderly household. For when we educate our servants to be nuisances, nuisances they will undoubtedly become.

"To-morrow. We will talk of it to-morrow. Good night."

"Amen, yes, and so be it. The truth

will out," said Betje, as soon as the gardener was gone.

"And now, your proofs?" said mynheer, trying to assume a magisterial air.

"Ask the girl, mynheer; she won't deny it. She's only too proud to tell it to any one that will hear."

"And her name?" He took out a note-book and neatly found the place and held a pencil ready. As if, poor man, there was any chance of his forgetting that name when once he heard it.

It would have been difficult for him, however, as it was fortunately unnecessary, to note down all the information which Betje vouchsafed him. She was eloquent by nature, and she had cultivated the gift. And she was moreover one of those persons whose religion mainly consists in glorying in the abasement of the human race in general and of their neighbours in particular. She

was logical enough in her way. "The world is very wicked:" that was her philosophy. "Therefore the people I meet with are wicked:" these were her politics; and "I must pray for their improvement, while I do not believe in it:" that was her religion. The only thing that was not perfectly plain to her was this: how her cronies, who shared her conceptions of universal depravity, could be stupid enough to find occasional fault with herself. She would sit for hours of a Sunday evening, lamenting with her friends from the village the fallen condition of mankind and the frowardness of the human heart; but she had not spoken for three years to a cousin who had ventured to tell her she was very self-willed.

She now rejoiced in the painful duty which she told herself she was constrained to perform. Never would she have spoken

another word on the subject, if Karel van Donselaar had kept his word. He had not kept it ; on the contrary, he had outrageously broken it, and neighbour's Cornélie was not unwilling it should be known that he had done so. In fact, it may well be questioned whether the triumphant stare with which she passed by Betje on Sunday morning, in a hat with curling white feathers and a couple of silver bracelets, was not preponderantly conducive to the virtuous maiden's visit at Steenevest. For Virtue can bear a good deal of personal disparagement and feel all the happier for its affliction, but Vice, rampant in a new bonnet and shawl, has always put it in a bad temper. It was so in the days of the singer of that wonderful seventy-third Psalm, and it is so to-day. And so the voice of duty called to Betje, and she obeyed.

“That is enough, I am sure,” said Mynheer van Donselaar. “It only remains to be

proved whether it is true. You will now, if you please, leave the matter in my hands. You say you came upon them together unexpectedly some days ago. What did you do on that occasion, may I ask ? ”

She told him, leaving out the little incidents of the chastisement she had inflicted and the rix-dollar she had received.

“ Arnout Oostrum ! ” said Mynheer van Donselaar, interrupting her story with a sneer. “ A very fit person, indeed, to advise my son on the matter. It is he, probably, the young profligate, who has led the poor boy astray. ”

“ That, mynheer, I take leave to question, ” cried Betje, hugely proud of the phrase and the word. “ And—no offence intended—but I don’t think the cases are similar, though I would be the last person in Wyk to defend the wickedness of Arnout Oostrum. ”

She was viciously angry at her mistress’s

nephew, most of all, perhaps, on account of the sorrow he had brought to that mistress. She would find it impossible to forgive him ; in fact, she never has done so, but she was not going to have him abused—in her hearing—by anybody but herself.

“ Very well,” said Mynheer van Donselaar. “ What pay do you expect for having spoken here, or for keeping a quiet tongue in your head elsewhere ? We may as well settle that matter in this first and only interview.”

Betje crossed her two hands on her chest.

“ Pay !” she said. “ But, mynheer ! what other pay can I expect than the reward of a conscience at rest ? Not that my place is a profitable one in the sight of the world. Far from it. It's not one of those kitchens of the wealthy where the butter-pot is left open all day. And I lost my best Sunday shawl on that evening when I tried to rescue your son. But I don't mention it. And

I labour for that which prophesieth not—profiteth not, I mean. No, I mean I do not labour for that which profiteth.”

Mynheer van Donselaar looked in his purse for a gold-piece. He had not one—and yet he remembered having had it—there was only a note for twenty-five florins. That was too much. He wanted to get rid of the woman—the sooner the better—but he did not want to give her double the sum he had intended. So he got up, all dazed by the terrible revelation she had brought him, and stumbled across the room to unlock a strong box which stood on a side-table. Then he came back to her. “Go,” he said; and she, nodding her head in what she imagined to be a curtsy, retired from the field of her labours, with a vague consciousness of having sown the seed. Only she found the golden harvest rather small.

Mynheer van Donselaar, left to himself,

sat in his armchair, a prey to two conflicting impressions. The aberration of his eldest son was a heavy blow to him, heavier than it would have been to many a father ; first, because he himself had always been so highly respectable ; and secondly, because he had been firmly convinced, with an opinionated parent's blissful confidence, that his children obeyed him in everything, and were growing up models of propriety like himself. But, looking at the delinquency entirely from the social, and not from the moral point of view, his chief sentiment was one of excessive irritation and injured vanity. "If Karel had been the jonker from the castle," he said to himself, "the thing would have been, perhaps, hardly agreeable, yet far from unusual, and, on the whole, rather smart ; but it doesn't answer in a man of business. No, no ; it doesn't answer. And we must put a stop to it at once." And at the same time

there came creeping upon his anxiety about his son the uncertainty what could have become of that ten-florin piece which he had had in the morning. They mixed themselves up in his head, and he could not keep them apart. It need not be said that he was exact in money matters. Good heavens! He remembered as if it were yesterday that period of his life—it was in one of the first years while he was managing the business for his mother and sisters—when an error of $37\frac{1}{2}$ cents had remained inexplicably fixed in his balance. How it had tortured him through the sleepless nights, and kept him in a ferment of addition and subtraction through the restless days. He was sparing of his money in those days when he had little, as in these when he had much; but he would have willingly sacrificed a hundred florins, if thereby he could have bought the clue to his mistake. Such an accident had

never occurred again in all the years of his book-keeping—he would not have called it an accident, but a crime; nor had he ever lost a piece of money except that fifty-Pfennig bit which had dropped past the bag during the collection in the church at Ems, and rolled into the hot-air grating, a loss he could never remember without regret. He wanted to know what had become of that gold-piece, and he wanted to know what must be done with his light-minded young son and heir.

He looked at the clock, and then at his watch; he always looked at both together, unconsciously, except when they differed. “Half-past nine,” he said. “Koos will be coming in presently. I shall see, when Koos comes in.” And then he began counting up his money, and fuming and fussing about that “golden Willem,” till he had almost forgotten Karel’s amorous entanglement.

Koos walked in before his father had come to a satisfactory conclusion, with his nightly report in his hand.

“Koos,” said mynheer, without looking up from his papers, “where is Karel?”

“In his own room, I presume, papa,” answered Koos as usual.

“And what is he doing in his room?”

“He reads a great deal, I believe, papa.”

“And what have you been doing?”

“Playing the violin, papa.”

“Well, go up and tell Karel I want to speak to him.”

Koos moved towards the door.

“Never mind about the coffee to-night,” said Mynheer van Donselaar. “Oh, you might just tell me one thing. Are prices up or down?”

“Down, papa,” said Koos, with his hand on the open door. “To 7.30. And Boon and Bruin have failed.”

"You don't mean to say so!" cried mynheer, starting up. "Boon and Bruin failed! What next! Tell me all about it. Sit down, Koos. Tell me everything you know. It is most remarkable. I should have thought they were good for another six months at least."

"People were saying they would be good for thirty-five per cent., on 'Change," said Koos, as he came back to the writing-table.

"Not they," replied his father. "They will pay fifteen per cent., and be rich men again in a year or two. But give me the particulars first, and then you can go up and fetch Karel."

A few minutes later Koos, having told what he knew or conjectured, sought out Dorothy, and explained to her his dilemma. "The old gentleman is asking for Karel," he said, "and Karel is out in the woods and far away."

"Then you must just go down and tell father that he is not in the house," replied Dorothy with kindling eyes.

"But I don't like playing the sneak, Dolly," objected Koos.

"This is not playing the sneak. You have no choice but to go on lying to father or to tell the simple truth. I myself have often been in doubt, of late, whether I should not open father's eyes to Karel's goings-on—unasked."

"Am I my brother's keeper?" said Koos lightly—as young men do say when they want to save their brothers from perdition and feel their powerlessness to do so.

"You have no choice," said Dorothy severely, "and I am glad you have none. Go down and answer papa's question, and leave the rest to come right as it can. I don't know, and I hardly wish to know, why Karel runs out every evening, but he can't

be after much good. I have tried to speak to him about it once or twice, but you can't get much response out of Karel."

"There is one thing I don't quite understand," began Koos hesitatingly—"I wouldn't say anything to hurt you for the world, you know, Dolly—only I can't make out how you judge Arnout Oostrum so differently. You—you seem to have such a fund of indulgence for Arnout Oostrum; and, after all, Karel doesn't seem to be half as bad as *him*."

Dorothy felt herself considerably flustered by this direct inquiry. She had flattered herself that she was cruelly severe in her judgment of Arnout, and that she had brought to light this severity in her brief conversations on the subject with Koos. She was amazed to discover that Koos had received such a different impression, and she inwardly resolved to be far sterner with her own heart in future.

"I don't know," she said awkwardly. "I was not aware I was too lenient about Oostrum. Still, I think I have this excuse, that the cases are probably very different. I believe, if we could know the particulars, we should find that Arnout Oostrum was more sinned against than sinning."

Koos stood for a moment looking at her, desirous, undecided, fluctuating between yes and no. Then he came back to her and put his arm around her neck, in the silence and the darkness. And she took his hand in hers and pressed it, and so, without a word and without a tear, she opened her heart to him and accepted the solace he was yearning to bestow.

"You must hear my new sonata," he said presently, gently disengaging himself. "I have been practising that difficult bit all the evening, as you advised me, and I think I have got it nearly perfect now. I wish it

were not so hard to play well. Only the wicked things seem easy."

He tramped downstairs unwillingly to his father, and opened the study door.

"Ten and two are twelve, and seven nineteen," murmured Mynheer van Donselaar. "Well?"

"Karel is not in the house, papa."

"Then why did you say he was, Koos?"

Koos shrugged his shoulders. "I thought he probably would be," he said.

"No, you did not. You knew that, of late, he has constantly been out at night. You lied to me, as you have repeatedly done, on the matter. I don't think, Koos, that I have ever told a lie since I was a boy at school. But my children, it appears, think differently of these matters."

"Dorothy doesn't tell lies," interposed Koos hotly.

"I did not say that she did. I was

alluding to my sons. You do. It all comes of your so-called artistic tastes. Every artist is a liar—as he must be, for art is lies—but every liar is by no means an artist. It takes a good deal to become a thoroughly artistic liar, Koos. I don't think I ever met more than one in all my life, and that was your uncle. You might perhaps emulate his example in time, if you think it is worth the trouble."

"Don't speak to me like that, papa," said Koos tremulously. "I don't lie to you as a rule. Only I thought I ought to try and shield Karel."

"I shall speak to you as I choose, sir," said his father pompously. "My children are a source of great sorrow to me, and I fear I have treated them with too great indulgence. But there will be no more of this, so I warn you. Henceforward I shall never trust you again."

“ But, papa—— ”

“ Silence! Leave the room. And your blood be upon your own head. It is nearly supper-time. Go and see if Dorothea is downstairs.” And he returned to the search among his accounts for the missing money.

He rose from it, unsatisfied, as soon as the clock struck ten, and went into have supper with his children. Karel did not turn up—an unusual circumstance, for, as a rule, he managed to be back in his place at the table. Only on one or two occasions had it been necessary for Koos to find an excuse for him.

After supper—*and* evening prayers—Mynheer van Donselaar wished his children good night, and went round to lock up the house as usual, Piet, the man-servant, being in attendance, also as usual, with a candle and the keys. And it was then that Mynheer van Donselaar extracted from Piet the con-

fession that the servant had been bribed by his young master to sit up occasionally and let him in. He dismissed the man on the spot, with a six-weeks' notice, instead of the customary three months (for so long do Dutch mistresses have to endure their departing domestics), and then he put out all the lights and prepared to sit up in the dark.

He occupied himself with repeating his calculations, waiting alone in a little cloak-room off the hall, till the clocks with which the house abounded had all rung out through the darkness the hour of eleven. He noticed with much displeasure that a couple of minutes elapsed between the striking of this clock and that, and that only two struck exactly in unison. "The irregular," he said to himself with a sigh, "is the only rule. Happy the fool who can't think or act straight."

A few moments after the last tone had died away, he heard stealthy steps coming up the avenue, and then a low whistle. He went to a little side door and opened it, standing well back in its shadow. The night was very dark, yet he could distinguish the figure of his eldest son, as the young man slipped into the passage.

"Here, Piet," whispered Karel, holding out his hand without looking round, "here is what I promised you."

His father quietly took the proffered coin, and threw-to the door, whilst Karel hurried upstairs. Then Mynheer van Donselaar went back to his study, lighted a candle, and looked down on the piece of money his son had just given him.

He recognised it at once. It had had a little green spot on it which he had casually noticed, and there the little green spot was

still. A sound broke from him which was very like a groan of pain, and then he snuffed out the candle carefully, and crept up to his room in the dark.





CHAPTER II.

“YOU BORE US, PAPA.”

BREAKFAST as usual. The uncomfortable old Dutch breakfast. Bread and cheese for the men. Bread and honey-cake for the women. An egg for the invalid. Family prayers first at eight o'clock, Mynheer van Donselaar reading, with a steady voice, the story of the Prodigal Son, and a lengthy disquisition on it out of a Dutch “Day by Day ;” then the meal, solemn and silent—but that was nothing new at Steenevest—broken at times by a remark from Karel, which the others answered in monosyllables. A general feeling of thunder in the air.

“Karel,” began Mynheer van Donselaar,

as his son pushed away his cup and rose from the table, "I have to return a sum of money to you, which you erroneously bestowed upon me yesterday evening. Or was it an act of restitution, and did you remember that the money was rightfully mine?" He flung the gold-piece on the table as he spoke.

Karel allowed himself, for a moment, to be utterly perturbed. Then he recovered his presence of mind, and said as calmly as he could—

"Yes, papa, it is true that I came home late last night. I had been to young Langhoudt and stayed to supper. I had no idea you would sit up, of course. And I had promised Piet a tip."

"Tell me first," said Mynheer van Donseelaar, "how you extracted yonder piece of money from my purse. I suppose you did it while I was asleep on the sofa after dinner.

After that, you can tell me what your intentions are with regard to that girl, Cornélie."

"I see," said Karel, thrusting both his hands deep down in his pockets, and making himself as tall as he could. "It's all up. Of course I thought it would be some day. Very well, papa, now you know it, what next? Life can't easily be more hateful anywhere else than in this house, and any change would be an improvement, I should say."

"~~You~~ You will have the change, Karel," said Mynheer van Donselaar quietly.

"I am glad of it, papa.—What do you mean, you two," he continued, turning fiercely on his brother and sister, "by standing grinning there? Get out, can't you, and leave papa and me to settle this little business between us?"

Dorothy would have spoken, but her

father also waved her away. The pair left the dining-room with heavy hearts.

“Karel,” said Mynheer van Donselaar, as the door closed upon them, “you are my eldest son. I have done everything for you—both for your education and your entertainment—that an enlightened parental affection can effect. You have not been spoiled, I admit it, but, far better, you have been kindly nurtured. You have rewarded all my fostering care by dissolute conduct, and—far worse—by theft. You, a merchant, and a merchant’s son, have stooped to theft. I tremble to think what future perhaps awaits you; but the crimes which you may possibly commit you shall not commit in this country. You will leave this house with me within six hours, and you will not return to it. We shall procure an outfit together in Amsterdam, and you will sail for Java by the next boat that goes out.”

“And what am I to do in Java?” asked Karel.

“I will give you letters to my correspondents out there. You will be put to work on a coffee-plantation in the interior. And your future will depend upon yourself.”

“Is that all?” asked Karel politely.

“Yes, that is all, for the present. Oh, Karel, Karel, you are worse than the young man we read about this morning. For, at least, his father had given him the money he wasted on riotous living. Oh, my boy, my boy, if you could but see the error of your ways, how very quickly you would depart from them!”

“My father never gave me any money to waste,” said Karel quickly. “And now, papa, listen to me for a moment. You have favoured me with your view; may I trouble you with mine? Ever since I can remember,

I have been bored to death in this house with a thousand little worries and fusses that are of no good to any one, not even to you. I don't say that you have treated me cruelly, though you have never showed me any kindness worth mentioning; I suppose you are fond of me—and of the others—after your manner, but it is a manner, in any case, which we children don't understand. We are thoroughly uncomfortable, and, in one word, you bore us. A weight is taken off our hearts whenever you leave the room. Under these circumstances, I have looked for amusement elsewhere. I have gone a little wild, undoubtedly; but the blame—if there be much blame—is not mine. During all these years it has been the one enjoyment I have had. It was not altogether an innocent one. But will you oblige me by remembering, papa, that I told you it was the only enjoyment I had ever had. And

now I am ready to go to Java till you want me back again."

"That will not be soon," said Mynheer van Donselaar, livid with wrath.

"You know, papa, that I never lay wagers; but I should almost feel inclined to offer you one that you will want me back for the business some day. For, whatever my faults have been, you must admit that I was good for the business. Was I not good for the business, papa?"

"Yes," said Mynheer van Donselaar, "but a thief." And he walked out of the room.

"A thief!" said Karel to himself. "C'est trop fort. He is really insupportable, and I shall be glad to get away from him. He owes me a good deal more than those beggarly ten florins I appropriated yesterday. Here have I been making money for him for the last three years without even getting

a decent salary. The money, and much more of it, is mine by right. We shall see how he manages on Koos's fiddling. I shan't much mind getting a sight of the world, and they say life is jolly enough on some of those big coffee-plantations.”

Nobody considered it worth his while to worry about Cornélie.

“Papa,” said Dorothy at her father's study door, “papa, you must let me in! I want to speak to you.”

No answer.

“Let me in, papa! I have something of importance to say.”

Still no answer.

It was then that Dorothy went round by the open French window and walked into the room.

Never had such boldness been heard of in the annals of Steenevest. The study door,

even unlocked, was an almost sacred barrier ; but locked, it became a thing of majesty, hardly to be passed by in the hall without a feeling of awe.

Mynheer van Donselaar was sitting in his armchair, with his head in his hands.

"Papa," said Dorothy, "I must speak to you. And you must listen to me, if you please."

"Dorothea," said her father in broken tones, "go away."

"No, papa, I cannot go away," answered the daughter boldly. "I am the only woman in the family, and as such I have a right to speak. Mine is the woman's side of the business. Is it true, papa, that Karel is going to India?"

"Yes, Dorothea."

"And what is to become of the—the girl? Of course, I understand that there is a girl in the matter. Besides, Koos admitted as

much. What is to become of the girl, papa?"

"That surely, Dorothea, is no business of yours."

"But it is my business, and, unless you will speak to me about it, I must find out for myself. I am resolved, papa, to do what I can for the girl."

"I shall do what is right," said Mynheer van Donselaar, removing his face from his hands and resuming his ordinary pompous manner. "I shall have the girl's circumstances carefully inquired into, and I shall see that she is pecuniarily compensated and enabled to marry some worthy person in her own station of life. Be sure that I shall do all that is just, and more than is just, for the creature to whom you unwisely allude."

"Papa," said Dorothy, "I cannot agree with you, and that's why I wanted to speak to you about the matter. As Miss Varel-

kamp says in that—that other case, the girl is not fit to marry another man, papa. For, you see, she is Karel's wife."

"What folly is this?" said Mynheer van Donselaar angrily. "I have trouble enough at this moment, I should think, Dorothy, without your coming to me with such mischievous folly. In a few hours I take Karel away to Amsterdam."

"You are resolved?" cried Dorothy, in a tremor of excitement; "you refuse to give him a chance of redeeming the past? You separate him from the woman, and thereby render his repentance impossible? Is it so, papa?"

"If you choose to put it like that—yes."

"It is a crime, papa. I have warned you; I can do no more."

She was going, but he called her back. In the abandonment of his sons, his heart

clung to his only daughter with an unaccustomed tenderness.

“Dorothea,” he said, “do you really mean that you think it would contribute to any one’s happiness, if this transient caprice were to be welded by us into a lasting chain? Do you think it would be for the wretched girl’s benefit any more than for Karel’s?”

“I don’t know about that, papa,” said Dorothy; “but I know it would be right. And I know also, that, if once society recognised it to be inevitable, there would be an end of all that seducing of women which is the curse of the race.”

“These are Miss Varelkamp’s notions,” said Mynheer van Donselaar pettishly—“an old maid’s notions, and utterly impracticable. I tell you, Dorothea, that there could be no greater misery imaginable for this servant-girl than to make her Mevrouw van Don-

selaar. And the boy would have the good sense to reject such a plan."

"The greater coward he!" cried Dorothy with flashing eyes. "What, then, did he think of, or intend, when he stole upon her innocence?" The angry tears welled forward, but she forced them back.

"Hush! hush!" said mynheer. "These are no subjects for you, daughter. But," he added, as a sudden thought struck him, "if you speak like that, then, Dorothy, your quondam lover would have to marry Madame de Mongelas?"

"Papa!" stammered Dorothy. "Don't speak of it. Yes."

"Do you mean that? Does she mean that? With all the misfortunes it would entail? You are a pair of fools, then, child. Do you mean that you are ready to support your principle into its most extravagant consequences; that, if I allow Karel to offer

his hand to Mejuffrouw Cornélia, you will promise me never again to think of becoming the wife of Arnout Oostrum ? "

" Is it a bargain you are offering me, papa ? "

" Yes," he said, somewhat rashly perhaps, but the promise was worth obtaining, and he knew that Karel would scoff at the proposal.

She did not so firmly accept this latter contingency, and, for the moment, the struggle thus to gain her point was violent within her. Then her simple integrity gained the day.

" Papa," she said, " I don't want to deceive you. I must tell you that I already considered myself bound in the sight of God never to become the wife of Arnout Oostrum as long as he can marry Madame de Mongelas."

" And yet you love him ? "

" Yes, papa, I love him still."

“Dorothea,” said Mynheer van Donselaar, “I respect your motives, though I cannot understand them; but I assure you that your suggestions for Karel’s punishment—and such they practically become—exceed anything that simple cruelty could devise. It is unreasonable, and we will say no word about the matter. I am going to leave for Amsterdam, as I told you, in a few hours. I shall stay with Karel till he embarks. And I shall take the same opportunity of looking for a house. We are going to leave Steenevest, Dorothy. We are going back to Amsterdam.”

“Going to leave Steenevest? Oh, papa!”

“Yes, child; at least, for a time. I am not sure yet whether I shall sell the house. But I must return to the office, Dorothy. I cannot leave Koos to manage affairs alone. He is too young; and he fiddles too well. He has not a business-head.”



CHAPTER III.

GRÂCE POUR MOI.

“You have been out with the American again,” said Madame de Mongelas. “He undoubtedly has excellent cigars, but you smoke too many of them, Arnout. You retain the smell. I am the last woman in the world to object to smoking; you know I like an occasional cigarette myself; but one must not notice the smell. There is nothing so odious and so un-‘comme-il-faut.’”

“If I am odious,” said Arnout, “I will go downstairs again.”

“No, you will not do so detestable a thing, but you will stay upstairs with me and make yourself agreeable. Now my foot is well

again, or nearly well, I am dying of ennui. It is too hot to go out, and I like the heat, only I must have 'B. and S.'s,' as Mr. Doyer says, and conversation. Lucille reads to me, but she mispronounces all her words as soon as she sees them on paper. I have hardly seen you all day, Arnout. You are not 'gentil.' "

"You are late in discovering the fact," said Arnout.

"Heaven, let us have no bickerings, no recriminations! There is nothing I abhor so much. You are a Prince Charming when you choose, mon cher, but you do not always choose. Or let me say, if you like, that the fault is mine. A woman's caprices! Des vapeurs! Shall I play to you? Very well, then you must open the piano. Do you know, Arnout, you have very greatly improved in music since you have had the advantage of my tuition. Your taste was

bad—do not be angry with me for saying so—and you did not know the difference between the two Bachs.”

“The two Bachs?” queried Arnout.

“Offenbach and Sebastian. There is a difference. I believe you would recognise it by this time.”

“Tormentor!” said Arnout, laughing. “There are a great many things you have taught me, and I am quite willing to admire your taste; but you needn’t tell me that you appreciate Bach. He is not in your line. Play me that Spanish dance with the staccato in the middle—you know, the castanets—if you don’t feel inclined to sing.”

“I am not flattered, as you perhaps think I might be, by your admiration of my taste,” she said, as she arranged her music and drew off her bracelets. “It is only vanity displaced. You are not at all a coxcomb, Mynheer Oostrum; you are only uncon-

sciously vain. It is the worst form of the disease—the chronic one ; we women usually have both kinds at once.”

She struck a few chords, and then glided into a Hungarian rhapsody. She played on, dropping from one tune into another, through a succession of dances, avoiding, with a waywardness which frequently came upon her, especially of late, the particular one for which Arnout had asked. She played brilliantly, showily, with what we call “accuracy and finish,” as they play who can give nothing in music except what they have been taught, but who can give that to the very last iota, and who have been taught well. She enjoyed listening to her own faultless runs and roulades, and she skipped to and fro over the piano in a triumph of ease and grace. Was she a musician ? Well, she never sat down to the piano without wondering whether her auditors liked—the view.

She stopped at last, to take rest. Arnout had gone to the open window—a great window thrown back from the balcony, through which the soft warm air stole in, lightened by the light of ten thousand stars. Round the huge scarlet shade of the lamp numberless insects were fluttering and buzzing, and Jacko, a silken grey bundle on the Turkish tablecloth, was trying in vain to catch some of them, skipping to and fro over the books and between the flower-glasses, to the imminent danger of all things breakable, and of the gigantic crystal lamp in particular. Arnout carried him off to the balcony, protesting and spluttering, and there strove to make him dance to the music. Jacko *could* dance, but he now absolutely refused to do it. Ever since he had been rescued from the misery of fairs, he had resolutely dropped the accomplishment which reminded him of his former squalor, just as

the gentlemen who are called late in life to country squiredom sink the shop and forget the price of tea.

"Why didn't you play my Spanish dance?" asked Arnout. "The one I asked you for?"

She threw a glance at him full of mischievous mutiny, and for only answer struck another half-dozen chords on the piano, and then broke into song—into song which he knew only too well—

"L'amour est enfant de Bohême."

"Not that," he said passionately, leaving the monkey and coming forward. "Not that, Dorine. Sing something else. I don't like it."

"Why not?" she asked in surprise—in genuine surprise—breaking off abruptly.

"I don't know," he said fiercely. "I don't like it. I am afraid of it. Sing something else."

"No," she said, with something like a pout,

"I won't. Why should I? You merely say it to vex me. And you know it is a favourite of mine. I like that energy of the last line—

"*'Et si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!'*"

She struck some of the notes as she ceased speaking. But he caught her by the arm.

"I will not stay to hear you sing it," he said hoarsely. "There is the very devil in you sometimes, Dorine."

"Mon cher, you are more than ridiculous; you are insulting. I was singing for your own pleasure, not for mine, and I will select something else if you prefer it. Let go my hand. What shall it be? Ah, I know."

And she sang the great aria from "Robert." He shrank back from the piano under the shade of the heavy window curtain, looped up in an Italian drapery, and stood listening and looking at her. She went through the first verse steadily, her splendid voice ringing out the wild appeal into the breathless night,

faultlessly devoid of any shriek in its agonised cry. And then she came to the second. She sang that also till the desperate words repeated themselves. Then her voice faltered, she stopped, she started up from the piano, and came towards Arnout. She swept him with her on to the balcony out into the night. And they stood there for a moment, breathless, motionless, in the tranquil, balmy glory of the starlit summer night.

“Grâce,” she said very softly, “grâce pour toi-même. Et grâce pour moi.”

And then they fell into each other's arms with kisses and tears.





CHAPTER IV.

MISS DONSELAAR HAS NO TROUBLES.

“ You, then, must help me ; you, who have done the wrong, should at least afford me what remedy you can. For you, far more than she whom I once loved to call ‘ Tante Suze,’ have driven me forth from home, from the nest under the eaves. I don’t regret going—don’t think I regret it—only let me go in peace. They have told me that you loved me, and that I deserted you. I know it is not true, for I know that you drove me away. But I want you to *tell* me it is not true ; I want to see it in black and white, in your handwriting, that I am indifferent to you ; that you are glad I am gone. I am

happy here : do not think I am not happy ; but leave me my happiness—leave me to retain your memory without sorrow and without regret,—above all, without regret. Tell me then, for pity's sake, that you too are happy, the happier because I no longer sign myself

“ Your

“ ARNOUT OOSTRUM.”

Dorothy laid down the letter upon the rustic table in front of her, in the little log-hut at Steenevest.

The postman had just brought it. Even now he was coming back along the avenue from the house where he had been to fetch the letters for the mail. He touched his cap again to the young lady in passing. “ Dag, Jan,” she said.

And then she took the letter up and read it over once more. It took long to read,

this second time, and yet it was very short. The first time she had flashed through it, photographing the whole contents upon her mind in one instant. Now it seemed to her as if she could not go slowly enough to grasp the full meaning of every word. She lingered over the short, sharp sentences, and considered them involved. She wished that, if he must write to her, he would express himself more clearly. But he had no business to write to her. How dare he do it? She told herself that she was very angry with him for daring. And then she smiled, for she knew her own heart better than most girls of her age, and she did not believe in her wrath.

But presently there came upon her, as she sat gazing at the letter, the recollection of—that woman—the woman who was with him, the woman who had ruined him. It was from that woman's side, perhaps with her

knowledge, that he wrote. Dorothy's colour rose, and she felt her anger rising with it. No, hardly with her knowledge, yet in her presence, and while still contaminated by her touch. Perhaps the paper was hers. It was of foreign make, thick and unglazed, neither the shape nor the texture of the dirty-white sheets, with "Bath" in the corner, which Arnout was accustomed to use at home. She felt a feminine curiosity to know where he had got such beautiful paper. Could it really be out of Madame de Mongelas's writing-case? She lifted it to her scornful little nose. It was perfumed, probably the favourite perfume of that creature. She flung it away from her. Her eyes flashed. No, indeed! How could he dare to write to her, and on this paper! "I am happy: do not think I am unhappy." What right had he to speak to her thus? Of such happiness as was his. He was insulting;

he was shameless. She was angry in good truth.

Most certainly she was angry. Nevertheless, she got up and fetched the letter back, and spread it out once more upon the table. She was very, very sorry for Arnout.

Not sorry only. She had never denied, neither to herself, nor to her father, nor to Miss Varelkamp, that she loved the man who had once asked her to be his wife. It was no use denying it. She would have liked to be his wife. Ever since that evening when her father's unreasonable refusal had supplied her with the answer she was in search of, it had been useless to deny the fact. She did not wish to.

But she had found a certain satisfaction in the thought that Arnout was contented with his choice. He had told te Bakel that he did not wish to return to Wyk. Miss Varelkamp's letter to Madame de Mongelas

had remained unanswered. And Arnout himself had given no token to any of his former friends that he desired for a change in his condition. There was much, undoubtedly, that Dorothy could not but most deeply regret. The woman whom Arnout had chosen to share his life was not a fit companion for him. She was a Roman Catholic, and not even an earnest one. She was much older than he; she belonged to an altogether different class and nation. It must be doubted whether she would make him happy. But he loved her. To simple-minded Dorothy all these obstacles were the greater proofs of his all-conquering affection. He loved her—madly, with a passion which she could not understand, but which, in men, judging by the not very numerous novels she had read, was by no means uncommon. Then there were the poets—and of these she had read a good many—“Hero and

Leander ;" "Troilus and Cressida ;" "Romeo and Juliet," and all the rest. Love, in men, always rejoiced in the strangest combinations and the most awful impediments. They climbed up to it, by preference, in the very jaws of death, and in the teeth of common sense. No wonder that Arnout should love unfitly. Unfitness was of the essence of love.

But she was content to think he should be happy in his choice. After all, no man could alter it. And the one thing that remained to be done now, Miss Suzanna was striving to do it—to bind him definitely to the woman whom he had preferred before all others, that he might call her his.

Said Dorothy to herself: "I have been selfish. And foolish. My father was wiser than I. It was out of courtesy—out of chivalrous impulse, let me rather call it—that Arnout Oostrum offered his hand to me when he did. He would never have

done it had he not felt called upon to come to my rescue. And it was from the same impulse that he repeated his offer after my father's refusal. He can never have loved me. For, had he loved me, he could not have loved Madame de Mongelas."

And she was wounded at the thought of this chivalry, bestowed not for her sake, but for his own. I think, had she been left to herself, her pride would soon have conquered all weak hankering after runaway Arnout. And, besides, an honest Dutch maiden does not go on loving the man who shows that he will not have her.

But this letter disturbed her in the repose into which she had fallen. It wanted not her warm young heart to read between the lines. When her outburst of indignation against the Frenchwoman had died away—no, she could make *no* allowances for Madame de Mongelas—her interest once more centred

on this man whom she loved, and whose thoughts, from the strange vortex of passion into which he had deliberately cast himself, now turned, of all women, to her. Let him reiterate that he was happy. It was not true. There was something in the tone of the letter which told her it was not true. He was unhappy, restlessly unhappy, and he wrote it to her.

Did he love her still? Tush! He had never loved her. And he expressly told her it was not this which caused him unhappiness. She sat silent, with meditative eyes, gazing out across the strip of lawn and the flower-beds, and the meadows stretching far and wide, in which the cows were browsing. One of them, an old grey one, attracted her attention for a moment. The animal seemed dissatisfied with its food.

He was unhappy—oh, disgraceful thought!—because he feared that she was pining for

him; because he feared that he had acted wrongly towards her, had acted—unkindly. Dorothy felt herself growing hot and cold. Unkindly! Not with proper consideration. The old chivalry again! It was his duty to be courteous to this good and affectionate little girl. Perhaps he ought to have married her from chivalry, and courtesy, and kindness. “They tell me I have deserted you.” Perhaps they told him she had said so. And perhaps they added that she had said that she wanted him back! She got up hastily, and fairly ran away from her own thoughts.

She must go and seek comfort of Miss Varelkamp. They were much together, nowadays, these two women, and each comforted the other without words. Dorothy put on a garden-hat and ran down the quiet lane. It was coming on to rain, but she did not notice that.

She met Mejuffrouw Varelkamp at a turn of the road. Suzanna had been visiting some of her poor. She had an empty basket with her and a bundle of tracts. There had been no alteration in her daily occupations, for she had seen no reason to make it. Of course she knew that it was not customary—even outside the confines of religion—for one human creature to endeavour to shorten the days of another; but she had never pretended that religion made you good. On the contrary, she had always fiercely asserted that it was the unrighteousness of rationalism to think so. And, even admitting that murder was wicked, she did not feel at all convinced that she had acted so very wrongly in trying to remove the Frenchwoman from her nephew's path. How much of her own theory she believed, and how much she fancied she believed, it would be hard to determine. But she convinced herself with

the more eagerness, the louder her doubts became. And with that inconstancy which we all show when matters come to a crisis, she denied the most salient point in her character, and was unjust to the French-woman. And her only regret—or, at least, so she told herself—the passionate reproach which never left her day or night, was this, that she had probably been chiefly instrumental by her unwisdom in preparing Arnout's ruin, and that she had, through her final rashness, brought about a catastrophe which might otherwise have been avoided. It might have been—but for her! Whatever her crime may have deserved, in that un-resting thought lay punishment enough.

Was she really never sorry for her deed? Who shall say? She would have told you, No. But, then, she was the very worst judge of the matter.

And she went and visited her poor, and

distributed her tracts, and she said—to Dorothy, once—that her conscience was at rest, but that her heart was very sad because of the injury she had done to the one creature on earth whom she loved with all-absorbing love. She must expiate that injury to him as best she could. And then she could lay down her head and die.

Probably she really desired to die, if this were once effected, for she would have nothing left to live for. But her health remained very good, and there was no reasonable prospect of her early removal.

In the mean time she went on digging her grave by all the means in her power; that is to say, she left no stone unturned to effectuate—what she dreaded most of all things, as the end of every chance of happiness to her—a legal union between Arnout and Madame de Mongelas.

She did what she could. She wrote to

Madame de Mongelas, but her letter remained unanswered. She could not write to Arnout; there was a gulf between them which she dared not bridge over. And, woman that she was, she did not feel the same compunction towards Madame de Mongelas.

By Jakob te Bakel's help she instituted inquiries in Paris with regard to the viscountess's antecedents. An Amsterdam agent for such confidential investigations was carrying them on; they were in progress at this moment, and she daily expected to be made acquainted with the results.

And in the mean time she lived her daily life, going the insignificant round of her duties. Only she was sterner, harder, more lonely, and more uncompromising than ever. Pleasures she had never had—except denying herself for Arnout's sake—and to this solitary distraction she now devoted herself

with greater energy than ever. The strict economy of the little house tightened into positive want. Suzanna had never had any extra pence, and she now laid aside many a much-needed penny towards meeting the expenses already incurred and those which she saw looming in the distance. She cut down Betje ruthlessly, allowing her less meat and less butter every week ; and Betje, though she grew visibly—not thinner, that was impossible, nor paler exactly ; let us rather say less red—only grumbled because the Juffrouw had given up butter altogether as well as the sugar in her tea.

“I will walk home with you, Miss Varelkamp, if you will allow me,” said Dorothy ; “there are some things I should like to talk to you about.”

“What is it ?” said Suzanna quickly in a low voice. Her thoughts leaped at once to the subject which never deserted her.

“Nothing of much importance,” answered Dorothy, alarmed by the earnestness of her manner. “We have plenty of time to talk about various matters. May I walk home with you? Have you been to see Baas Vroom?”

“Girl,” said Suzanna, “do not try to deceive me. You have news of—of him. Has he written? What is it? Has he come back?”

“No, no, dear Tante Suze!” cried Dorothy, touched to the heart by the yearning look in the sharp old face. “Let us walk on, and I will tell you.”

“I must know—now,” said Suzanna, stopping in the middle of the road. She clutched her grey woollen dress with the hand that held the empty basket, and drew her skirts about her. Her hands looked very bony in their coarse grey cotton gloves; her eyes blinked once or twice, and her chin trembled.

It was getting dark, for the clouds were sinking lower, and great heavy drops of rain were beginning to fall.

"He has written," said Suzanna. "And you are going to show me the letter."

Silently Dorothy drew it out of her pocket and held it towards the old maid.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp took it, and stood reading it. The long road was deserted but for these two desolate figures, arrested half-way. Over the wide fields on both sides black tracts of clouds were driving, and fierce gusts of wind dashed every now and then through the trees along the border. The rain came down faster—with a rush.

It was not till Miss Varelkamp had done reading the letter that she stooped to draw up her old skirt, revealing the grey knitted petticoat underneath.

She pinned this up with great neatness and precision, and she fastened her spotless

handkerchief over her bonnet, and then, when her arrangements were concluded, she said quietly—

“Perhaps it will be only a shower. Let us try and shelter in Baas Vroom’s cottage at the end of the road. I was coming away from there.”

They walked rapidly in that direction. Neither spoke. But at last Dorothy could bear it no longer. “Well?” she asked.

Miss Varelkamp turned her face towards her young companion. “Shall I tell you?” she said in a hoarse voice. “Ought I to tell you? Poor thing!”

“What?” asked Dorothy tremulously. “You frighten me, Tante Suze! What is it?”

“He loves you still.”

They did not exchange another word until they reached the cottage. Dorothy’s colour came and went. But, as they stood, all

dripping and bedraggled, shaking off the rain before they claimed admittance, she said with sudden vehemence, "He does not love me. He pities me, and he wants to be very good and gentle. And I must give him the answer he requires."

Suzanna only shook her head with mournful emphasis, and they went into the cottage together.

"I am not going to deny," said old Baas Vroom, sitting up among the pillows in his armchair, "that the rain may be an arrangement of the Almighty's, but then the rheumatiz isn't. Or, if the rheumatiz is, as you've been telling me all the morning, juffrouw, then the rain can't be; I feel certain. For the Almighty can't have created both the rain and the rheumatiz; the two of them together are more than mortal flesh can bear."

“Hush, hush, father!” said his daughter, going up to him. “Here is the Juffrouw van Donselaar.”

Everybody in the village liked Dorothy's sweet face.

“I see her,” growled the father, somewhat modifying his querulous tone. “She don't know what troubles are, she doesn't. They talk about its raining blessings. But it only does that on some people's fields.”

“At any rate, I have had more than my share to-day, Baas Vroom,” said Dorothy's kind voice. “I got drenched, as you see. Drenched. And I have come to appeal to your hospitality. You mustn't be rude to a guest.”

The old crosspatch scowled, hugely delighted. But he went on with his grumbling. “Juffrouw Varelkamp says I must be contented,” he said. “And so I am. But I don't see why I should sit all day inventing

imaginary blessings. I don't believe in things I don't see."

"What do you call blessings?" asked Dorothy. "Your nice cottage here, and your daughter to look after you and nurse you—what do you call these?"

The old man shook his head. "Them's not blessings," he said.

"Then what are, you ungrateful creature?" queried Miss Varelkamp sharply.

"Baccy," answered the Baas promptly, "and broth from the great house, and new-laid eggs, and smoked beef, and—and——"

"And gin," snapped Juffrouw Varelkamp.

"And gin," acquiesced the old gentleman readily. "Blessings is all the things as poor people doesn't have."

"And when poor people have them, they leave off being blessings?" suggested Dorothy, with a wicked merriment in her eyes.

"Yes," said the old invalid. He was not

going to gainsay so palpable a truth. And he fell into a fit of coughing.

His daughter came round to Dorothy and drew her aside, trying to remove the wet from her garments as best she could. Until now she had been similarly employed with the older lady.

"He is very faint, juffrouw," she said in a low voice, with a movement of her thumb in the direction of her parent. She had got into his way of misquoting Bible texts. "He is very faint, juffrouw, but he's dreadful pursuing. Dear, dear! the fainter he gets the more pursuing he becomes to me, I assure you. I'm worried half out of my life."

She did not say "worried," but she gave its Dutch equivalent. She said: *Gekoeieneerd*.

"I'm out of spirits," remarked the old man meanwhile significantly to Miss Varelkamp, and he heaved a deep sigh. "I'm out of

spirits, juffrouw, and I've been so ever since Saturday. It's very hard on a poor old fellow that used to have plenty once, and of the right kind too." And he twinkled his wicked little eyes. He was an old reprobate, and he dearly loved his joke. Miss Varelkamp's severity of manner made as little impression upon him as Miss Varelkamp's tracts.

"I've read about little Pieter," he went on, "He was a very worthy lad, was little Pieter, and he made an edifying end. But I should like to have seen child of mine who would have dared to speak to his parents in the way that little Pieter did when he reproved his drunken pa. I suppose it's because the good children all die in their youth, juffrouw, that the parents are always bad in the books."

"But I am not going to die," he cried fiercely, after a moment's silence. "Bring me my pipe, Willemyntje; I can smoke it

when the ladies are gone. I tell you, I won't die. What d'ye come here for and make me think I'm going to? I'm thankful for the soup and the medicine. But I know what the visits mean. You ladies don't come to visit poor people like us till you think that we're 'confiscated,' and then you think it's your duty to look in and give us a helping hand into your heaven. I won't go to your heaven. We've lived apart, and we'll die apart, and if I must go anywhere it'll be to a heaven of my own, Juffrouw Varelkamp, where the poor people get together and feed off rich men's flesh. There's nothing in the Bible about rich men going to heaven; it's the other place that the rich man went to. I want to"—he almost lifted himself in his chair—"I want to be left in peace. I am not going to die, I tell you. I won't die. Go away, Juffrouw Varelkamp, and tell the Domine I said so. And you, dear, good

Juffrouw van Donselaar, get the cook to send me some more chicken-soup, for the love of your pretty eyes, and give me something to buy necessaries. Sickness is a very bad thing for poor people, but—sickness—isn't—death." He sank back among his cushions, and covered his face with his hands.

"Let us go," said Miss Varelkamp sternly. "The rain has almost ceased."

Dorothy hesitated.

"Oh, don't mind him, please, juffrouw," said the affrighted Willemyn; "it's only his way. He often goes on like that. We're not really as poor as he says. We can get on very well, thank you, juffrouw; and we were very grateful for the soup."

"You *are* poor, Willemyntje," said Miss Varelkamp severely. "Very poor. It's nothing to be ashamed of. And nothing to boast about. I am poor also. Perhaps not quite as poor as you are, but certainly nearer

to you than to Miss van Donselaar. Good day. Don't forget the bandages, and that you must put them on cold."

The idea of Miss Varelkamp's poverty was both bewildering and amusing to Willemyn. She could distinguish only two classes, her own and the ladies, the poor and the rich. Miss Varelkamp was a lady, therefore Miss Varelkamp was rich. She dropped a timid curtsy when Dorothy slowly followed Suzanna, slipping as she went one of her own not too numerous rix dollars into the girl's reluctant hand.

Jakob te Bakel was limping up and down in front of Juffrouw Varelkamp's cottage. They could see from afar, by his restless manner, that he was a prey to overpowering agitation. His whole lank frame was quivering with excitement. He could not keep it still.

“I have news for you, Juffrouw Varelkamp,” he cried, as they hurried towards him. “Good news, as I take it. Excellent news!”

“Well, what is it?” she panted, seizing hold of his arm.

“Madame de Mongelas is not a widow at all. She is married, and her husband is alive.”





CHAPTER V.

SUZANNA SPEAKS HER MIND.

“You remember,” said Suzanna, as soon as they were alone, “what you promised me on the evening of that terrible Sunday?”

“Yes,” said Dorothy gently.

“And you are willing to perform it? Any sacrifice, if only it be for his lasting good?”

“Dear Tante Suze, what would you have of me?”

“He loves you, Dorothy—nay, do not deny it, your heart must tell you it is so—and you love him. But you can never be united upon earth. It is not merely your father’s will and your filial obedience. These might change at any moment. The form

of Madame de Mongelas stands irrevocably between you."

"But if she has deserted her husband——" began Dorothy involuntarily.

"That is her sin, not his, for he never knew it. I am sure he does not know it even yet. She is a Papist. I do not know what rules of morality she has or ought to have. Perhaps she need not have any. I have always told you it is his soul alone I am thinking of. And him I must save. Dorothy, I must save him, whatever becomes of me. He must still marry Madame de Mongelas. Ay, he must marry her all the more certainly because of this revelation which Jakob has brought."

"But, Tante Suze——"

"Listen to me; have patience with me. I am only a poor old woman fighting for my love. This woman, dearest, she has been his cause of stumbling. And only by desert-

ing her can his love, his passion—call it what you will—his choice become a sin, the most horrible of sins. I call it his choice, and that is enough for me. If the choice be wrong or right, herewith I have nothing to do. But he has chosen. It is too late. Dorothy, let me say it once more—it is the holiest conviction of my heart; I have ruined my life to remain true to it—the man who once chooses a woman to be his is wedded to her, and wedded to her for ever—all separation is desertion, all subsequent union is—hush, let us not say the word. If all women thought as I, the world would be, I do not say a Paradise—for how do I know?—but a better and purer place than it is now. It is because they do not think so, because they do not care, that men are what they are. There is no alternative for Arnout. He must either remain true to his wife, or he must desert her. He may not, he cannot

desert her. And you, Dorothy, you could not, by marrying him, now he is married, stoop to——” She stopped.

“But it is Madame de Mongelas who is married already,” said Dorothy.

“No; the Frenchwoman is divorced. On her own head be her guilt. She has deserted her home; she has committed the crime from which I must save my boy. The Vicomte de Mongelas is no longer her husband.”

“Jakob said that he was,” interposed Dorothy.

“In name, child. So be it. But once more I ask you, are these matters social conventionalities? Dorothy, oh, my blood can boil within me! Nowadays, in our civilised communities, the covenant of marriage, what is it but a stroke of the registrar’s pen? Have they sold you your little paper—what do they call it—certificate? Oh, it’s all

right; then you're married. You whose names are down, because you told him to put them there—A. and E. Never mind about B., who possesses all those holy claims with which the registrar has nothing to do. Never mind about B. at home in her garret with her deserted infant. Is there a baby? So much the worse for it, and for B. Call in the right reverends to bless the civil marriage, and to sanctify it! In the name of the Father, etc. God's curse upon you, smooth-faced priests of Venus, who daily hallow adultery by the blessings of the Church!"

She was violently excited. Her wan face flushed, her whole being trembled beneath the storm that swept over it. She paced up and down the room with her hands clasped in front of her.

"Hush, hush, dear tante!" said Dorothy, rising to take her hand and draw her down upon the sofa.

But she gently shook her off. "Girl," she said, "I tell you I have sacrificed my whole life—and the best of us can give but that—to the holiness of this truth I advocate. And now, in my old age, I am called upon to vindicate it once more. It is not my fault if others, such as your father or your brother, think differently. The Frenchwoman is separated from her husband. She is separated by that crime for which the Bible sanctions divorce. I must, then, obtain of her husband that he now divorce her, legally, where morally she is no longer his. What else can I do? It is right that it should be so."

"But divorce," said Dorothy in an awe-struck tone, "is that not always a wickedness?"

"No," said Suzanna vehemently, "not of the deserted one. Only of the deserter. Do you forget what our Saviour says?"

“But then, Tante Suze,” asked Dorothy hesitatingly, “why did you not try to obtain that Madame de Mongelas should—desert Arnout?”

“Girl,” almost shrieked Suzanna, turning fiercely upon her, “do you also tempt me—like the minister of God? Do you not think I have yearned for it, day and night? Do you not think I have longed to offer her every penny I possessed if she would leave him? Who am I that I should persuade even mine enemy to mortal sin? I could take it upon myself for his sake, and I did so; but what of the other—of the Papist—of her?”

Dorothy gazed at her, without speaking, but she read the question in the girl's eyes.

“I know what you would say. Who am I, a would-be murderess, to shrink from guilt? Well, yes, I, a would-be murderess. But the guilt of that deed was mine, for his

sake, none other's but mine. I must bear it, and account for it, and expiate it. And I cannot draw others on to wickedness for him. I cannot, I cannot," she repeated wildly, as if struggling with herself. "Do you not see that I cannot? I have proved it to myself over and over again. If I am wrong, I can't help it. If you don't understand human hearts, I can't help it. Leave me in peace with my own wickedness, and my own thoughts of right and wrong. Perhaps some day I shall weep tears of blood for my mad hate of that woman, and what it led to. Do you think it would have led me so far if I had thought of these matters as other women think? Because I knew that not a moment's whim, but his whole life's vocation, was trembling in the balance; because I knew that from that night's supreme decision there could be no repentance, no remission, no turning back; because—because

—oh, my God, because——” She could get no farther. She buried her face in her hands and stood trembling like an aspen.

“Your sacrifice,” said Dorothy softly, “shall be mine.”

And then Suzanna moved from her attitude of suspense. She came up to Dorothy and kissed her on the forehead.

“I must go to Paris myself,” she said, “to-morrow. Nobody else can do it. Is it far, Paris? Have you any idea how far it is?”





CHAPTER VI.

DOYER TELLS SUZANNA'S STORY.

"You are too much in earnest, my young friend," said Mr. Doyer, leaning back behind the blue curls of his cigar-smoke, and stretching out his legs. "Or rather you are, if you will allow me to say so, not earnest in the proper place. You take seriously those things which you ought to treat with greater facility ; and, on the whole, you are perhaps inclined to pass over too lightly those matters of life which are of the most vital interest."

"It all depends on what one considers important," said Arnout moodily.

"That is true. I agree with you. The

hotel-keeper here has really very decent whisky."

"Now, I consider there is nothing of greater importance in creation than this question of the love which one human being bears to another. It is the only thing worth living for."

"There I cannot agree with you," said Doyer, still watching his tobacco-smoke.

"What then," cried Arnout, "is there else?"

"Money-making," said the American coolly. He brought down his eyes from the ceiling, and emptied his coffee-cup.

"That is horrible," said the young Dutchman with a shudder. "Horrible! All the difference between the stars and—an ink-blot. The thoughts of an angel, and the vomit of a dog."

"You are poetical," replied the older man quietly, though a faint colour underspread

his dried-out cheeks ; “ and you are graphic. Granted. It is another matter whether you are just. It is all very well to speak scornfully of money, young sir ; but will you allow me to draw your attention to one circumstance ? There is no other way of living than either on the money you have earned for yourself or on the money that other people have earned for you. As long as that simple fact remains, the question will also remain, whether money-making is so very contemptible. I can understand, however, that love-making is preferable, especially to the young.”

He poured himself out another cup of coffee, and very slowly and methodically lifted the milk-jug. And, with his eyes intent upon the sluggish stream issuing from the spout, he added thoughtfully—as if speaking to himself—

“ Even on another person's money.”

For a moment Arnout hardly realised the words. Only for a moment; then they crystallised, as it were, into shape in his brain, never to leave it again.

“Who are you,” he cried, starting up with cheeks aflame, “to dare to address me thus? What right have you, with your insolence, to judge my conduct or my motives? Yes, sir—with your insolence. You are an old man, but I cannot regret the word. What right have you?”

“Hush, Arnout, sit down,” said the stranger coolly. He did not remove his eyes from the milk jet, but, all the same, he did not seem to notice that the milk was overflowing his cup.

At the new insult of the half-mocking tone and the familiar use of his Christian name, young Oostrum clenched his fist.

“I assure you that such violence is very youthful. I am willing to answer your

question, if you will only be quiet and sit down. What right have I? I am your father : that is all."

"You are pleased, sir," cried Arnout, "to be funny. To be impertinent, in one word, as well as insolent. For me it can only be painful to hold such parley as this with a man who is indeed old enough to be my father, as you say. I have the honour to wish you good evening, and, while thanking you for the kindness you have shown me in the past (hang his cigars !), I must request that in the future you will leave me in peace."

"D—n it!" cried Doyer, throwing down the empty milk-jug and also starting to his feet. "Stay here, you sir—Arnout, do you understand me? Listen to me." The young Dutchman continued his slow walk down the terrace. The American sprang after him, calling out, "Look here! Do you see this

little revolver?"—he had drawn one from his pocket. "If you don't stop and hearken to what I've got to say, I'll send a bullet through your hat."

Arnout did not turn his head, and therefore he did not see the little revolver. But the next moment a bullet whizzed through his hat with a faint click, and went soaring away into the still air. It was not really a risky thing at that short distance—not even with a revolver—for a man who knew himself to be a first-rate shot.

"And the next," cried the stranger, his voice hoarse with agitation, "will be for your head, unless you stop."

But our stubborn young friend marched stolidly on. The American threw down his weapon with another oath. "You're plucky," he said, "there's no denying it. Come back, Arnout. It's Gospel truth I'm telling you. I *am* your father, so help me God!"

Oostrum stopped, hesitated, half turned round. The other's tone was not that of a man who was joking. Perhaps he was deranged in his mind.

"Come and sit down and listen quietly. It's a long story, but I won't tell you all of it to-night. I am your father, as I said to you. It's nothing to be so very angry about."

"My father is dead," said Arnout.

"Not if he knows it, he ain't. Nor don't mean to be for yet awhile, boy! Pretty lively, thankee, considering that dig in the ribs he got in San Domingo," said the stranger, dropping into English. Then he went on in French: "No, my son, you may still rejoice in the possession of a parent. Would you like to hear him talk Dutch? It is sixteen or seventeen years since he left his mother-country, but he can still say 'Asjeblief, meneer.'" He held out a chair to Arnout as he spoke the last two words.

Arnout came back to the table and, taking up the revolver, which still lay where Doyer had thrown it down, he quietly dropped it over the balusters into the basin of a fountain underneath. "I don't like firearms," he said, "in the hands of—" he checked himself—"those that use them." And then he sat down, with his hands in his pockets, and waited for what was to come. He did not believe the stranger even yet.

That gentleman poured himself out two little drams of whisky in succession, and drank them off. Then he said—

"It's all true, every word of it. I was coming to Holland on purpose to see what had become of you, when what must I do but run across you in that Cologne hotel. Name? I know your name well enough, though it isn't mine. No more is Doyer. I took that on so as you shouldn't spot me first sight. I haven't been ashamed of my

name, not even when I got into pretty scrapes with it. I've always pulled it through the bramble bushes somehow, and managed to get my pickings where I could. You're Arnout Oostrum, you are. And I'm Arnout Donselaar."

"Donselaar!" cried Arnout. "You are Dorothy's uncle that ran away!"

"That was shipped off abroad, if you like. It was no running of mine; and, besides, I was past forty. I'm many years older than my immaculate brother, but he got together a family council all the same, and they bundled me out of the kingdom. I can't say I was loth to go, even though I had to leave you behind."

Arnout made a gesture of impatience.

"No, my boy, it's no use your denying it. You're Arnout Oostrum. It was your mother's name, and it's yours. I hear she died not long after I left the kingdom, and

then, it appears, Suzanna Varelkamp turned up in the nick of time to look after you."

"Then, if this story be true, you deserted my mother?" said Arnout in a trembling voice.

"What could I do, boy? I hadn't above a thousand florins in the world. I gave her three hundred of them. We had lived together, till my father's death brought on the crash."

"And what connection was there between Juffrouw Varelkamp and me?" queried Arnout anxiously.

"None whatever. That is to say—yes, I had better tell you everything. I was engaged to Juffrouw Varelkamp; I was to have married her. In fact, the date was fixed. It would have made another man of me. And, then, she found out—by accident—this about your mother, and she broke it off at once. She talked some nonsense about

bigamy, and my being married already. She was a young girl at the time, and she told me she'd never have me as long as the other was my wife. I lived with your mother for many years afterwards, Arnout. She was a very good soul, but not the kind of person I could possibly marry, and, after a considerable time, when I saw that Suzanna was inexorable, you were born. It was very stupid of her, and I dare say that now she most deeply regrets it. The strangest part of the whole story is that I'm convinced she was as fond of me as any girl can be of a man, and I'm sure that I liked her well enough. Oh yes, I liked her. She wasn't by any means bad-looking, I can assure you. Yes, I always consider that Suzanna Varelkamp did me the greatest injury of my life. But she seems to have been good to you."

"When my mother died, deserted," said Arnout, looking away towards the dark

mountains and the far black water, "I suppose I was penniless."

"Unless you had a penny in your pocket for sugar-plums," answered Mr. Donselaar-Doyer jocosely. "I don't fancy she can have left much behind her."

"Thank you," said Arnout. "And now—supposing all this to be true—what is your object in recalling it?"

"Oh, hang it!" answered the newly found parent, "is that the light in which you look at the matter? Why, it's the—*what* d'ye call it?—the prodigal father's return, or some such thing. After all, you're my son, Arnout, and I want to see what I can make of you. It's very lonely, growing old alone, I can tell you. I've had a rough time of it for many years, and it wasn't till I thought that you'd find it worth your while that I made up my mind to come and look after you. I did it quick enough, then."

He crossed and uncrossed his legs, and then he poured himself out a fourth glass of whisky. Evidently he had not found the explanation as easy as he had hoped. Then he went on—

“It’s just simply this. I’m rich now. I’ve a lot more money than I can possibly use for myself. I’ll take you back. I’ll make a man of you. We shall rub on very well together, I have no doubt; and I’ll get them to give you my name over yonder, where they’ve not those brutal Dutch laws. And there’s that little filly of my brother’s—the scoundrel!—didn’t I understand you to say he had a daughter? Perhaps you might as well marry her, Arnout. I bet she’ll have a pretty penny to her fortune. Trust the young curmudgeon, her father, for that.”

Arnout did not answer. He was lost in a maze of conflicting thoughts.

“Aunt Suzanna must have loved you very

much," he said at last. He was thinking of the life of sacrifice devoted to him, for his father's sake.

"The more fool she not to marry me. It's no use taking these things too seriously. And that's why I spoke to-night, although originally I had intended to wait a little longer. You are getting into a mess, my dear Arnout, with this French sister of yours. Trust me, you had better leave off in time. She is dazzlingly beautiful, and charming, and I can very well understand a young fellow having his head turned by her. But you have had it turned quite long enough. Never mind heads being turned as long as they don't get screwed in that position. And it's high time you were twisting round."

"Sir!" began Arnout with all his hauteur.

"Nonsense! Surely your father may speak about the subject. I tell you that

both you and she have had enough of each other. I can see what I can see. You quarrel. And you are out of sorts. This is the moment to leave off, for this is the moment when things become serious. And, as I said at the beginning, if you once treat a light matter seriously, you will have to treat all the serious things of life lightly henceforth. Take warning by me. I have been very frank with you to-night that you might do so. Now, or never, is the moment to escape. If you once go on staying together, after you have left off wanting to do so, there is no reason why you should ever separate. And that, of course, is impossible, absurd. The woman is an adventuress."

"I will hear nothing," cried Arnout fiercely, "not even from you, against Madame de Mongelas."

"Tush! You are all for the tragic side. Passionate but pure—and that kind of thing.

Suzanna's teaching, I suppose; though Suzanna's teaching has ended rummily enough with you, my boy. I don't quite see it. And, besides, I prefer blonde women. Well, you must just think it out. You now know my offer. Come with me, and be Arnout Donselaar; but I must say that my meaning is, minus Madame de Mongelas. How about my brother's daughter? You know her. Do you think she would do to make you a nice little wife?"

"Miss van Donselaar is a most lovely and most charming girl," said Arnout, glad of the shadow in which he sat.

"Come on. So much the better. Then we must have a wedding in a couple of months. I don't think her father'll object when he hears what I can do for you, and I should like to make up with my relations. And so 'Good-bye' to the ravishing French-woman! What do you say?"

"I must see," said Arnout, "I must think of it."

"Do so, only not too long. Most decisions get the worse for being thought over after they were come to. And take to heart what I told you about love-making not being the most important thing in existence. It's the garnish—I don't deny it—but the solid dish is ambition. The making a name, and a fortune, and a position in the world, that's what a man puts his shoulder to the wheel for. I've made the fortune, and now I want my son to get the honours. You can't dawdle on for ever in orange-groves and under roses—and the money not even yours."

"Good night," said Arnout, rising to go.

"Good night, Arnout. I should think we might shake hands."

Arnout let his hand lie for a moment in the old gentleman's.

"And I think you might—just for the

joke of the thing—not that I care for it. I'm not sentimental—dash it!—but because it would sound so comical,—you might just call me 'father' for once."

"Father, if you like, mynheer," said Arnout, and went his way.

"It's not nearly such good fun finding a son as I had expected," said the stranger to himself with a bitter sigh. "All the same, he's a good lad, a plucky lad, and a lad of spirit. I've watched him long enough, without his knowing it, and he has the making of a man in him. He's young still, and this love-affair is a foolish business, but it's the kind of thing that proves the mettle of a boy. He'll be all the better for it. Only I wish we were well through."

Arnout, leaning over his balcony in the darkness, had thoughts enough to occupy

his mind. There was something pleasant, undoubtedly, to a young fellow who thought himself penniless a couple of hours ago, in the discovery of an utterly unexpected fortune, even when that fortune was handicapped by an objectionable parent. Perhaps he scarcely had a right to call this new-found progenitor objectionable. He certainly could not say that he felt drawn towards him. But here was the fortune, and the future name of Van Donselaar, and every chance of consent from Dorothy's father, should that consent ever come to be asked.

He tore himself away at last from his own cogitations, and stepped back into the room and lighted a candle.

The light revealed a letter lying on the table. It had doubtless come by the evening post, and been brought up into his room.

He glanced at the superscription, and tore it open. It was from Dorothy.

“DEAR ARNOUT,

“What would explanations avail, when they can alter neither the past nor the future? You have chosen your wife in the sight of God, and are bound to her by irrevocable ties. Love her, then, and be a good husband to her unto the end. I shall rejoice above all things to hear that you are happy, but I know that you will never be that till you have married her also in the sight of your fellow-men. Happiness is not a matter of temporary pleasure, or even of lasting worldly success. It is a matter of doing right.

With the most earnest prayer for your well-being, bodily and spiritual, I shall ever remain your faithful friend,

“DOROTHEA VAN DONSELAAR.”

He struck down the candle to the ground in a passion of he knew not what wrath and despair.

“Arnout,” cried a voice, disturbed in the stillness, “are you in your room? How long you have been away! How late it is! Oh, it is wrong of you to leave me alone like this!”

“Dorine, Dorine!” he said to himself with vehemence, “you are the only creature in the world who has ever really loved me; and they want me to lose you. I love you, Dorine; I love you! I will never give you up!”





CHAPTER VII.

MEVROUW BARSSELIUS GOES TO SEE A BABY.

DOROTHY had written her letter a day or two before the limit accorded by Mevrouw Barsselius for Arnout's return. "You remember," Juffrouw Varelkamp had said to her, "that this worldly advantage is another which you are letting slip. It is of importance, especially as regards your father, for he is one of those men—you know it as well as I do—who pay attention to such matters. If he knew that my nephew Arnout was Mevrouw Barsselius's heir, he would probably be inclined to look with far more favour upon his suit. Now, I know my sister Annemarie. She is good-natured, but

she is pig-headed, and I fancy she will stick to her arrangements. At this moment the money is still there. Have you taken all this into account ? ”

“ My dear juffrouw, you are piling up the agony,” Dorothy had answered. “ Do you know, it is almost unkind.”

“ It is my duty,” said Suzanna shortly. She sat bolt upright over her knitting. She still knitted unceasingly. For she had quietly gone on with that dozen of woollen socks she had been getting ready for Arnout’s winter provision. Only she dropped a stitch now and then, as she worked, at rare intervals, when she could not see clearly, because of that film between the needles and her eyes. “ She is very hard-hearted,” said the neighbours, as they passed by and saw her sitting under the shade of her window-curtain, ceaselessly knitting. They said so, because she had refused their sympathy

indiscriminately, meeting all inquiries and insinuations with a frigid stare and a polite "My nephew has gone abroad for a time." Only to one or two of her most intimate Sunday cronies she had purposely added, "You will hear news of his formal engagement, probably, very soon ; but do not speak of it to any one." The old ladies had told this bit of gossip all over the village, and the village shook its head, to a man, and looked unutterably wise.

Suzanna had been obliged to postpone her departure for a day or two, just long enough to procure a small sum of French money, and to arrange her few indispensable travelling things. She was to leave for Paris on Monday, the information with regard to Madame de Mongelas's husband having reached her on Thursday afternoon. She would not have travelled on a Sunday, not even, I fancy, to have saved Arnout's life.

But she would attempt a murder, you will say? Ah, that was to save his soul—a very different stake in Suzanna's estimation. Besides, although Suzanna persisted in fiercely looking upon herself as a murderess, and in vehemently rejoicing over her attempt to deliver her nephew, even by a crime, yet it must not be forgotten by those who judge her, that her deed was the outcome of a moment's frenzied confusion. Not much more, when you come to think of it, than the tremble of a hand. At least, that was what Madame de Mongelas said, after the first flash of anger and alarm. But Suzanna thought otherwise. And at the bottom of her heart, deep down under all the passion and the exultation, smouldered a fire of burning reproach for a sin that lay unfessed.

Mevrouw Barsselius had anxiously counted

the days as they passed, but it was not till they had actually exceeded their allotted number, that she realised how her cleverly conceived arrangement had failed. She came into her breakfast-room after a bad night—an unusual thing with her, in spite of her carefully cultivated asthma—and she complained bitterly to herself of the ungratefulness of poor relations, as she got ready her solitary cup of tea. She scolded Bijou, a new habit she had got into of late. Bijou had good reason—if only he had known it—to regret the manifold delinquencies of Arnout Oostrum. But he did not know it, and he only came to the conclusion that his mistress was growing very cross and unmanageable, and that, really, he would have looked for some other place of residence, if she had not been so inordinately attached to cold chicken, a weakness he found himself quite able to share. He grumbled, then, as

he crept into his basket, but, once in it, he soon fell asleep. And she grumbled, also, as she read over a charity prospectus which the postman had kindly brought her. She abused the promoters of the movement during the whole of her protracted breakfast, and then, finally, she crumpled up the paper and threw it into the slop-basin. But next morning she sent them a rix-dollar with her compliments. She pulled an ugly face over the gift, as she did it up in a bit of white paper, but the recipients did not see the grimace, and they bless her memory to this day.

“I shall go and see Suzanna,” she said, as she rose from behind the tea-tray, brushing off the crumbs with her fat hands from her brown silk dress. “I must give her a bit of my mind, and all the good people of the village. It is a pity of the young fellow! To be ruined by a pack of women for a couple of whims.”

So she had the close cab from the stables, with the two meagre horses and the coachman who was never drunk before three in the afternoon, and she drove round to fetch Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk to accompany her. Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk lived over a tiny shop full of baskets and brushes at the far end of the "Straight New Canal," which is called so because it twists in and out, and is three hundred years old at the least.

The New Canal, like most of the canals of the good old town of Overstad, sleeps the sleep of dignified repose. Its sluggish waters dribble lazily round the doors of the cellars down below. You can hang over the iron railings and wonder whether they move. High up above them runs the street—no, the word is of all others most unsuitable—lies the street, on both sides of the deep-sunk line of gloomy water, a rough roadway of boulders between two neat stripes of little

bricks. The trees that border it are green and leafy ; the grass that creeps across it is also green and fresh. The tall houses, that rise up in straggling rows, nod quietly to each other. They are many-storied ; the canal is narrow ; the sky is grey. If they bent forward a little further, perhaps they might prop each other. There would be nobody to see them do it, for all the inhabitants of the place are fast asleep. Not so ; you would be much mistaken if you jumped to that conclusion. They are wide awake, every mother's daughter of them, sitting well out of sight, behind their little " spy " mirrors, watching—like very spiders—for a passing " fly " to creep into them. But the polished glasses only reflect the deserted street. Very rarely does cab or carriage rattle down it, making a terrible hubbub on the stones. Foot passengers there are, of course, at intervals, who slink along the sombre house-

fronts, with seemingly aimless tread. Never, in that drowsy nook, forgotten of the nineteenth century, does a man go by who looks as if he had anything to do, or would be anxious to do it, if he had. In the early morning there will come a slight rustle in the stillness, because the milkman and the baker and the butcher go leisurely down the long line and climb up the tall "stoops" and ring peals that frighten the solemn somnolence of the neighbourhood, but that is only a ripple on its repose. At spring-time, also, the trees burst into life, and spread forth a splendour of cool bright verdure, and the birds will come and twitter modestly under the leaves. They would not dare to sing. And, all the year round, the front doors are green, and the muslin curtains hang white and neat as in a doll's house, and the brass bell-handles sparkle like diamonds, and the grey stone stoops are polished till you could

eat off them without disgust. And sometimes, on rare occasions, a ragged street-boy, lost out of the life of to-day, will come tearing down the middle of the road, across the grass-grown boulders, hoarsely shrieking "Extra telegrams!" "Latest foreign news!" But nobody ever buys of him. Not on this canal.

As Mevrouw Barsselius's conveyance rumbled out of a street, through which it could barely squeeze its way (but which, nevertheless, was intersected by tram-rails), a little boy in wooden shoes, who had been standing as if on the look-out, a few houses up the canal, turned round and scuttled eagerly over the stones, crying, "Here she is!" as fast as he ran. The part in which Juffrouw Vonk lived was the poorer one, and just at this point there is a cluster of small dwellings and shops, which breaks the line of statelier houses. A number of faces came hurrying to the doors, chiefly belonging to

old women with amazing frilled caps and children in long and numerous petticoats. "Here she is!" called out the old women to each other; and the little children cried, "Hurrah!" without knowing why.

Mevrouw Barsselius looked out of the carriage-window in amazement, her great purple face fringed round by the most old-fashioned of coal-scuttle bonnets, which she devoutly believed to be not only in exact keeping with her style of beauty, but highly fashionable as well. Mejuffrouw Vonk had only lately come to live in this neighbourhood, having quarrelled with her last landlady about the length of a candle, which she asserted to have grown mysteriously less. Her benefactress had not yet condescended to visit her in her new abode, and therefore now, having called to the coachman, that lady appealed to the little knot of women to learn the exact place of residence of Me-

juffrouw Adelaida Vonk. A cry went up which almost frightened the widow, and a couple of little boys, whose feelings became too exuberant for them, turned somersaults into anybody's lap. "That's it!" "Here she is!" "Hurry up, ma'am!" cried the crowd, which was momentarily increasing. It is amazing to watch what a number of little children and old women a couple of cottages can vomit forth at a stretch. "Come along!" cried one venerable hag, with her skinny hand on the carriage-door. "You shouldn't have been so late, ma'am. I've had fourteen myself, and I know how it feels when the nurse comes late." "No, indeed, juffrouw," cried another woman from her doorstep, where she was scratching the shock head of a dear little five-year-old. "It's a shame, and I was telling Mejuffrouw Vonk so, for you to let the poor creature lie without help."

Be it known to him who may not understand these allusions, that an interesting event had taken place that very morning in the family with whom dwelt Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk. It was she who—always fond of interfering everywhere—had recommended a special friend of hers as nurse. And this nurse, to the indignation of the neighbourhood, had not yet arrived. She had been sent for last evening in a violent hurry, and poor Adelaide was much distressed by her failing to appear.

“Here she is!” cried the children. There must have been more than a dozen of them. Wherever did they all come from? They skipped and hooted round the bewildered Barsselius, as a couple of eager arms helped that old lady out and on to the pavement. She was set down, struggling and puffing, and wondering what it was all about. And Bijou, who hated all common people with

canine conceit, stood up, with his slender paws on the ledge of the carriage-window, and gave vent to his indignation in a series of uninterrupted yelps.

"But what is it?" gasped the widow. "In fact, I did not want to get out. Where is Mejuffrouw Adelaida Vonk? I came to see Mejuffrouw Vonk!"

"Here," cried the old beldame who was drawing her along, "this way! Come along! You'll see quite enough of her, and a first-rate scolding you'll get. Come along, ma'am! Whatever did you bring that dog with you for?"

And the children, grouped round the narrow doorway through which the fat widow had been propelled, sang in chorus, "I came to see Mejuffrouw Vonk! Mejuffrouw Vonk! Mejuffrouw Vonk!"

Spluttering and protesting, but forgetting in her agitation and the energy of her resist-

ance to say what was really her style and quality, not understanding even, in the heat of her anger, that she was being mistaken for some other person, the indignant widow was propelled up a short staircase and into a dark back-room, already occupied by several people. "Here she is!" called out her guide, with exultation. "I've showed her the way, and I tell her it's a shame to be behind time, and I a mother of fourteen that can know!" "Yes, indeed," said a young man, evidently a medical student, or young doctor, turning angrily from the dim light of the shaded window, "and I really must say, mejuffrouw, that you seem to be very ill fitted for your business, if you can't even get up in the night." "I am sorry," fell in Adelaida's majestic tones, "that I ever recommended you to any one, and I should certainly not have done so, you worthless creature, if I had had any idea you would repay me with

incapacity and ingratitude!" All these reproaches followed each other so rapidly, that not a word of explanation could be squeezed in between them, and the darkness of the sick-room made it impossible to distinguish the speakers.

The sufferer, hid away in the bedstead, sighed faintly, and a querulous little cry, tremulous but persistent, quivered forth from somewhere among a group of bustling females.

The sound of Adelaida's well-known voice recalled Mevrouw Barsselius's presence of mind as if by magic.

"How dare you?" she gasped—for her breath was well-nigh gone. "Adelaida, you insolent creature! how can you venture to speak to me like that? This is the worst morning's work you ever did in your life, I can assure you, and a woman with my money——"

"Peace!" said the doctor authoritatively;

“hold your tongue and do your work, or leave the room!”

“Anna Maria!” cried Mejuffer Adelaida, and burst into tears.

“Oh, don’t make such a noise, please,” groaned the feeble voice from the bed. An angry flutter of protest arose among the ladies in attendance on the baby, and the doctor, incontinently catching the fat widow by the shoulders, pitched her out on to the landing and locked the door.

“Oh, let me go to her, I entreat you! I must speak to my poor Anna Maria!” wailed Adelaida’s voice from the inside. The door was once again opened, and a second female figure—gaunt, this time, and long—was projected into the little hall. The exit was effected with unexpected, and perhaps with unnecessary, rapidity, and Mejuffrouw Adelaida, shooting down on the widow’s ample rotundity, like a knife into a dumpling, cut

right through some of the softest parts of that lady's physical and psychical sensitiveness. The doctor, as he rebolted the door, swore a naughty swear about women in general.

Anna Maria sat down violently on the square of uncarpeted landing, and Adelaida, stumbling forward in the effort to regain her equilibrium, gave her benefactress's poke bonnet an ungentle push in passing. From the street could be heard Bijou's untiring protestations.

"Forgiveness!" sobbed Adelaida, as she fell up against the balusters.

"Never!" said Anna Maria, rubbing her head.

"I took you for the nurse!" implored Adelaida.

"The repetition of the insult can only augment it," answered Anna Maria.

"But the darkness of the room and the agitation of the moment!" entreated Adelaida.

“Oh, anything can excuse the behaviour of an idiot,” snapped Anna Maria. “Perhaps you might help me up, if you are not too stupid to do it. I don’t know how I shall ever get downstairs again. I should not wonder if the coming up were to cost me my life, so it isn’t of much account any way.” Upon which she allowed herself to be tenderly hoisted up and gently lifted down to the carriage. Mejuffrouw Adelaida’s angular face was the colour of a mulberry by the time she had got the widow back into Bijou’s obstreperous embraces. Two little boys, who still lingered, waiting for anything that might come, watched with dignified interest as the fluffy ball of excitement bounded all over his recovered mistress’s person, licking her face wherever he could get at it. “The one creature in the world who shows me unalterable affection!” sobbed the widow. “I would not insult him, Adelaida,

by saying that you have the heart of a beast."

"May I accompany you?" petitioned the spinster very humbly, making herself as small as she could by the carriage door. "Perhaps I might be of service to you, Anna Maria, and afford you some necessary assistance, in spite of your already having the help of Bijou." She could not keep back this modest little sneer. The widow was still too agitated to notice it.

"Oh, come if you like," she whined. "I drove round on purpose to fetch you, but I little knew what I was preparing for myself. Only let us get away out of this horrid, low neighbourhood. I don't see why you can't live in respectable quarters with the help I afford you. And the Straight Canal is too good for you, of course, at the upper end. But I can't stay for your bonnet. I feel very unwell. I must go home."

They drove off together in the direction of Mevrouw Barsselius's house, the widow still gasping, protesting, and spluttering generally. As she gradually smoothed down some of her worst-ruffled feathers, she began to realise that, having ordered the carriage, and being prepared for the journey, she might as well satisfy her curiosity with regard to the situation of affairs at Wyk. And she felt that she could not secure a better opportunity for venting all her indignation on Adelaida, than by boxing up that unfortunate spinster with herself during a two hours' drive.

"The air will do me good," she said, as she bade Mejuffrouw Vonk let down the farther glass a couple of inches. "Oh no, we cannot go back for your bonnet. You will either drive without it to Wyk, or you will walk home as you are. I dare say they're not accustomed to bonnets in that

neighbourhood, and probably nobody would mind."

She started the theory that Adelaida had got up the whole scene she had just passed through on purpose to insult her, and she clung the more tenaciously to her assertion the less she found herself able to defend it. At last, in the heat of the argument, she did not hesitate to answer "Yes" to Adelaida's indignant question, whether she thought the baby had been born exclusively on that account.

"Produce your nurse!" she cried triumphantly, as if thereby clinching the argument, "Only produce her! You know you can't. You haven't got a nurse to produce. Yah!"

"Not in my pocket, no," replied Adelaida; "but if you will come to the house to-morrow——"

"*I* return to the filthy hole," snorted the Barsselius, "at a second risk of catching

the measles, if I haven't caught them already ! You are too good, Adelaida, you are really too painfully kind. No, thank you ; I have had quite enough of visits to hovels, to—to dustbins, pigsties, dunghills—yes, dunghills. You must really excuse me, Adelaida.”

“Do you mean to insinuate,” queried Mejuffrouw Vonk, who had come to the end of a naturally short temper, which was only artificially—and, it must be confessed, inordinately—lengthened out by considerations of her legacy—“do you mean to insinuate, Anna Maria, that I am comparable to one of those useful, but unpleasing domestic animals for whose accommodation the buildings you mention are erected ; or, otherwise, that I might be alluded to as one of those articles, which, however necessary they may once have been, are now considered unserviceable and are therefore cast forth and carted away ? ”

“ Oh, rubbish ! ” retorted the widow, “ don’t make fine speeches to me. You’re like my so-called nephew, only the young scapegrace is no nephew of mine. No, Adelaida, you’re a very worthy woman, and I won’t deny it. But you must excuse my repeating that you are an idiot. Too great an idiot to be trusted with money. And after the cruel treatment I have received at your hands this morning, I shall certainly alter my will. I speak frankly on the matter, as you know. And I shan’t leave you the egg-boiler, for you won’t have any eggs to boil. Not that any mortal could boil anything with the rubbishy concern.”

With such animated intercourse did the ladies while away the long carriage drive. Miss Vonk knew that the best means of regaining favour would be to allow the widow to let off all possible steam, and she ultimately found herself rewarded for a large

expenditure of forbearance by the long postponed offer of a biscuit from her protectress's bag. She took it humbly, and ate it thankfully. It is all very well to be proud and to have your feelings, but she had not partaken of a too substantial breakfast, poor thing! and there is a certain feeling in the region of the stomach which is apt to thrust all others on one side. She was munching her second biscuit, as they drew up at Miss Varelkamp's door.

Betje ran out to receive them. "You're too late, mevrouw," she cried, her face full of importance. "The juffrouw drove off to the station exactly half an hour ago!"

The Barsselius thrust her head out of the carriage-window. She could just squeeze her bonnet through. "The station?" she cried. "Where to? What? Where has she gone to?" Bijou sat up and recommenced barking. At Betje this time.

"I don't know rightly," answered Betje. "It's to foreign parts. She said I must wait quietly till I heard from her. Juffrouw Dorothy knows. It's all Juffrouw Dorothy nowadays. But I believe she has written to you."

"Gone away!" Mevrouw Barsselius burst out into a violent passion. "Running after Arnout, no doubt! Disgusting! And to think that I should have been in time to stop her, if it hadn't been for your barbarous cruelty, Adelaida! I shall never forgive you! Never! The woman will ruin herself and him, and the blame will be yours! It will follow you to your grave. And whether you live long or short, you will live and die a pauper! So much for your baby, and your nurse, and all your wicked spite!"

At which Adelaida, worn out by so much labour laboured in vain, began to cry.

While the widow Barsselius was driving towards Wyk, Suzanna, having set all things in order and made such simple preparations as were necessary, was preparing to depart on her hazardous journey into the immeasurable, the unknowable, the great vague terror, which lay beyond her little world of honest Dutchdom. She knew nothing of foreign regions, as we have seen, than that wickedness was rife there—the wickedness of violence and the wickedness of fraud. But so much she knew, that all abominations of bloodshed and of obscenity centred in that beautiful city, the Babylon of modern civilisation, the fountain of revolutions, the mother of things—and beings—illegitimate. This she knew; and even her stout heart trembled at thought of the dangers she was about to face. She had courage enough, in her way, as we have seen, to fit out a small regiment, but she did not agree with Madame

de Mongelas that danger was a beautiful thing. As long as she could she avoided it. And the idea of travelling alone into what would probably prove to be a forest full of lions was inexpressibly dreadful to her.

She looked out from the fly, as she drove off, watching the little cottage grow less a-down the lane. Presently it was but a speck in the distance, with a still far smaller speck in front of it. Then the juffrouw could no longer see Betje, who stood uselessly waving her apron, the tears coursing down her hard cheeks, as if they wanted to mark them in white. Then the cab turned a corner, and even the cottage was gone.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp tried the lock of her flowery carpet-bag, and felt—it was the third time—for her keys. Then she placed one hand on her modest store of money, which was sewed up in a bag she wore next to her chest. Then she looked at her

watch, and as she still had half an hour to spare, and the station was ten minutes distant, she told herself she would be late.

She had said to Dorothy that she wished to go unattended to the train. And, in truth, Dorothy would have found it very difficult to accompany her. She was busy making preparations for the departure of the family from Steenevest. They were to return definitely to Amsterdam in a few days. Karel had sailed for Java, without a word of further explanation or repentance. Cornélie was engaged to a young carpenter from a not too distant village (with a thousand florins to her dowry): in one word, that whole little business had been brought to a most satisfactory and correct termination. There was a little complication, you know, of the customary sort, or there need have been no compensation at all. Mynheer van Donseelaar behaved with great wisdom and

generosity — with very great generosity indeed.

“What!” cries Common Sense, “would you have the respectability of the family violated, the refinement of the marriage-tie destroyed? Would you tell me that wedlock is nothing but——” Hush! I would lay down none of these laws. I, who tell you the story of Suzanna Varelkamp, I am an impartial chronicler, or fain would strive to be so. I tell you what *she*—an erring, loving woman—thought and did. Be it for you to choose your own right and wrong, if only you are as honest as she was. I believe that Mynheer van Donselaar was honest, according to his lights, but he was not as particular about his lights as he might have been. Most of us, adrift on the ocean, are too eager in our look-out for harbour lights, and we strike against the rocks of the wreckers, because the shortest and easiest way out of

difficulties tempts us on to our ruin. Let us, then, not be too hard on those who are not content with the simplest solution, but fancy that the most arduous must be the right one because of its peril and its sacrifice. At least they aspire unto something better, purer, holier than themselves. And God have mercy on those who have forgotten to do that ; or, who, remembering, deny it.

The first object Suzanna noticed as she drove up to the little shed which did duty for a station was the lanky figure of Dominus Jakob te Bakel, standing well out in front of it, gazing down the road.

"I told you not to come, Jakob," she said reprovingly, as he helped her to alight. She was disconcerted by his presence ; she was too unhappy to want anybody's sympathy.

"And I disobeyed you, Tante Suze. I will never do it again. Only this once."

He helped her with her ticket and her

luggage—not an easy affair. She could only get her things booked for Utrecht *viâ* Overstad; and from that junction she would have to take a fresh ticket for Paris.

“So you see, Jakob,” she said, not very graciously, “it was hardly any use your coming, after all.”

“No,” he answered quietly; “you ought to have assistance at Utrecht. However will you manage to travel alone?”

“God will help me,” said the murderess. She meant it too, every word of it. But her lips trembled with agitation nevertheless.

“There are lions, you know, and tigers,” continued Jakob, “that meet you in the road. In fact, they are to be seen in the most frequented parts of the city.”

“That is dreadful,” said Suzanna. She did not think he meant what he said; but she did not know what he meant, and she was sure it must be dreadful.

"It is," continued Jakob imperturbably. "But the most terrible of all is, when you see one of these lions driving a pair of horses in front of him, and the tiger, perhaps, sitting up behind."

After a moment, during which he enjoyed the not uncommon experience of seeing his joke fall dead, without an answering ripple on Suzanna's face, he added—

"Here comes your train. I shall find a carriage for you, and then we must separate for a time. Not smoking, I suppose?"

"Third-class," said Suzanna steadily. "Farther down."

He obeyed her. "But you can't travel third-class in France," he said. "No trains; and what there is, I have been told, unfit to be used."

"I shall do it as long as I can," said Suzanna; "and, as for unfitness, all foreigners are dirty, and smell of garlic."

“Who has been telling you that all foreigners smell of garlic, Tante Suze? How many foreigners have you ever seen? Have you ever spoken to one except Madame de Mongelas?”

“Never mind,” said Suzanna, ruffled. “No; in fact, I have never spoken to any, except to one or two governesses, but I have heard a French minister preach. He was a good man. I suppose it was very foolish of me, but I remember being much surprised to think he should be so good a man—and yet French. Put my bag on the seat, please, not up in the net. And now, Jakob, good-bye!”

Jakob vanished, as he was bid.

At Utrecht, as she got out, hot and flurried among the bustle of large traffic and small accommodation, the first thing she saw was Jakob te Bakel standing on the platform, evidently waiting to offer his help.

"Jakob," she said, almost angrily, "what is the meaning of this—this well-meant, kindly folly? I told you to stay in Wyk."

"But I disobeyed you, Tante Suze! I will never do it again. Only this once."

He got her well through the worry and confusion of fresh registration. She had only one small box and her carpet-bag. But one box, in travelling, requires almost as much care as twelve. Remember that, dear ladies, when paterfamilias complains of your luggage. And make him take the maximum number. For we like to see you tastefully dressed.

At the frontier station a new ordeal awaited Suzanna in the shape of the custom-house formalities. How would she get through them? The question had been worrying her for the last hour.

"Let me help you with the carpet-bag," said a voice at her side—Jakob te Bakel.

“You are going with me, Jakob!” she said, altogether disconcerted. “How can you do it? You know I forbid you to do it.”

“I disobeyed you for this once,” said Jakob as coolly as ever. “I shall never do it again, Tante Suze!”

“But you say that each time,” persisted Suzanna.

“Oh no—excuse me; the disobediences all flow together and are one. They are my *finale*, you understand.”

He opened her bag for her, and locked it again. Then he led her to her compartment, and, standing with one foot on the step, he said—

“Is there any necessity, now that I am travelling by the same train, for our occupying separate carriages? Or do you grant me permission to come into yours?”

And so, after an uneventful journey—un-

eventful to Suzanna except for the fact that now, abroad, even the common people all spoke French—they steamed into the Gare du Nord.

Then came that succession of what look like meaningless annoyances which makes travelling hideous through the garden of Europe. For no man in all creation has such talent for unprofitable discomfort as the French railway director—unless it be the French State official. What would Suzanna have done? It may well be asked again.

As they at last drove out of the station, after a couple of hours' delay, in their neat little yellow-glazed cab, Suzanna pressed te Bakel's hand. "I am glad you came with me," she said.

That was all the reward he got for a sacrifice which would cost him so much. He had just received a definite sum from a lady who had intended it to be spent in the

purchase of books. It had come in the nick of time, for it had put an end to his indecision about going—the “oracle of the Bible” having proved inadequate this time.

It was all he got. But he knew Tante Suze. And, knowing her, he knew it to be more than enough.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUSE IN AUTEUIL.

A TALL, quiet house in rural Paris—for there is a rural Paris still—a Paris which is half tramway and races and chemin de fer de ceinture, and half village-street and pump and provincials—a Paris of trim villas with flower-decked gardens and contented old rentiers, and of odd little all-round shops, where you can buy cheap toys and sweets as well as vegetables and newspapers—the Paris that lies beyond Passy : Auteuil and Boulogne sur Seine (which, by the way, is no longer Paris) and Billancourt.

A many-storied house, then, in Auteuil, down a quiet sunny street, where the blue-

frocked children play freely in the gutter, and the concierges bring out their chairs on to the pavement and chatter over their needlework. The inevitable café at the corner ("de la République et de Versailles"), with its smell of absinthe and the inevitable sergent de ville in front of it, in his cape and képi. A broad white road and white pavements, a strip of garden with green railings and red roses, white walls with narrow scarlet-curtained windows—and the warmth and the light and the nameless coquetry of Paris over it all. Inside, discomfort and cheap finery, tarnished gilding and faded red satin, wax-flowers under glass-cases, a crystal chandelier done up in yellow gauze. The Paris which the Parisian sees twice or thrice in a lifetime, 12, Rue de la Prairie aux Primevères.

A concierge appeared out of her underground den when Suzanna's cab stopped at

the door, one of those viragos whom Paris loves to produce, a woman of immense bulk, with a black moustache, bright black eyes, and untidy hair. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the place was as yet only half awake. Suzanna had found it impossible to delay any longer in the humble hostelry in which she had passed the night, and she had therefore started early on the long drive out to Auteuil. Jakob accompanied her. But he was to wait for her outside. On this she had insisted. She must see the French-woman's husband alone.

"Monsieur le Vicomte de Mongelas, does he live here?" asked Jakob, politely lifting his hat to the virago.

"Fourth story, second door to the left, opposite the glass gallery," said that lady in one breath and a gruff voice.

Jakob was fain to ask for a repetition of the longest word he had ever heard in his life,

and, under many snorts and scowls of protest from the Cerberus at the Gate, it gradually fell into its component parts, and he understood that Suzanna must mount four flights of stairs to her destination.

"Well," he said, laughing, "it's a good thing you are not Mevrouw Barsselius, Tante Suze."

"As if I minded stairs, Jakob," retorted Juffrouw Varelkamp nervously, "or anything else. If I can get him to do what I want for me, it will seem like a ladder that mounts into heaven."

"Into heaven?" repeated Jacob incredulously.

"Yes," she answered hurriedly, "the only heaven that is left me—the heaven of doing right. Will you ask her to show me the way?"

"Oh, but no," said the lady of the gate indignantly, when this request was made

patent to her. "I am there, monsieur, to furnish indications, but I am not an ascenseur. The vicomte is at home, you cannot mistake him; but I doubt that he will be visible at this hour. You can inquire."

"Thank you, madame," muttered Jakob in Dutch, as he helped Miss Suzanna to alight, "and it seems to me that if they could have supplied your head to Cerberus, they need hardly have added two more."

"Ces Anglais!" grunted the concierge to herself, as she crept back. She was right, after all; you could not expect her to act as parlour-maid to the numerous inhabitants of the house. But of French customs, and especially of French politeness—which is polite, exquisitely polite, except in its official capacity—Suzanna and her travelling companion knew as much as you and I of Timbuctoo.

So Suzanna climbed upstairs alone; and

on the fourth story she found a door, as indicated, on which was fastened a large visiting card—The Vicomte de Mongelas, Officer of the Legion of Honour ; Ex-captain of the Fourteenth Chasseurs d'Afrique, and, in the corner, the address of a café, on the Boulevards.

Suzanna knocked. No answer. She knocked again. Nothing but the silence, the beat of her own heart, and a drowsy voice, somewhere at the back of the building, droning, "En revenant de la Revue."

A few more appeals remained unanswered. The voice in the distance went on unconcernedly singing. Suzanna crept downstairs again.

"Well?" said Jakob te Bakel, waiting in the cab.

"There is nobody there," answered Suzanna faintly. "Hunt up the woman and make her say something, Jakob, please."

The concierge proved indignant. Could she help it if rentiers lay longer in their beds than people who had to work for their living, like her? The vicomte had been to the theatre last night. He had come home by the last train, as he almost always did. She had pulled the "cordon" for him at half-past twelve. He was an old man. He must have his rest. And nobody ever came to see him. What did madame want?

This last question aroused her curiosity, in the very act of putting it. She wanted to follow it up, but Suzanna was not going to answer. She stood in the middle of the strip of garden, uncertain what to do next.

"Go for an hour's drive in the Bois de Boulogne, round the corner, and come back again," suggested the concierge, who, seeing nothing could be extracted from the strangers, was anxious to get rid of them.

"No," said Suzanna to Jakob, "that would

be unnecessary expense. And there has been no unnecessary expense except the franc for that pillow you would have me take at Tergnier. I could have rested just as well without it."

The cabman was sulky. He stood reading his *Intransigeant*, and eyeing them from time to time with malevolent eyes. He had reason to be angry with foreigners who took him off the stand for a drive to Auteuil—the *ultima thule* of Parisian cabmen—and who studied the tariff the greater part of the way.

Suzanna dismissed him, paying but a small additional fee, and thereby rousing all the latent vehemence of his Jehu-nature. "Abuse me as much as you like," she said; "I don't understand you;" and she sat down on a bench under a spreading chestnut tree by the side of the broad pavement, and took out her knitting. Said Jakob to the coachman as he followed her, "Pas faire, pas bon."

"Go to the devil!" growled number 17,317, as he drew the cloth off his horse's back. He fired a retiring volley of cabby-amenities at them over the roof of his vehicle as he rattled off.

And then the broad, sunlit street grew very quiet under its row of majestic trees. Suzanna, on her bench, casting anxious glances from time to time at the windows of the fourth story opposite her, prepared for the coming struggle. What should she say to the man—this gentleman, this foreigner! How could she ask of him what she desired to ask—divorce! Yet she must ask it. There was no other way.

"Jakob," she remarked presently, "I sometimes, when I feel how powerless we are, comprehend how useless it is. Do you understand me?"

"Not exactly," said Jakob.

"No; I do not perhaps clearly understand

myself. But I mean that it is no good trying. All our right is wrong, and so often our wrong is right. Sometimes one thinks it does not matter, because, after all, we can do nothing. But we want to do; there is the mystery. Jakob—tell me, tell me—don't you think I love God?"

"Tante Suze!" cried the young minister in much distress.

"Yes, I know. But what is the use? He has deserted me. I—I am all alone. And ever since—through the last weeks—I have been telling myself that I did very wrong—very wrong towards Madame de Mongelas. But it is only the brain says it, not the heart. And the brain rejoices to say how very, very wrong it was, because then it can find the easier excuses. And, indeed, how could I help it? I must save him, by fair means or foul! There was only one way, and I tried it. We must work out our own salvation

with fear and trembling, and we are powerless to do it—oh, my God, we are powerless! Powerless!” She bent over her knitting till he could not see her face.

There was silence between them—the passionate old woman and the pure young priest. High up in a neighbouring tree a singing-bird broke into sudden little bursts of song.

“I am only a quiet old Dutchwoman,” resumed Suzanna after a time; “but it seems to me, the more I wonder over it, that there is no escape for a mind that thinks but idiocy or—madness.”

“Or faith?” whispered the Dominé.

“Faith, which is idiocy,” gasped Suzanna, “or madness, which is doubt. What am I to believe—you, who wear a white tie and know? Am I to believe that it was God’s will that Arnout should be ruined, body and soul, by this strumpet? That, to me, is

idiocy. Or am I to believe that He wished me to save the boy by killing her? That, to me, is madness; for I failed. Am I to rejoice that I failed, when my failure means the boy's perdition? Should I have rejoiced, had I succeeded, when murder meant his deliverance? What do we know? What must we do? Must all the world go wrong because we may not be our own avengers? Must evil triumph because it were wrong to arrest it? To work out our salvation! And we are powerless to do it. Powerless! Oh, my God! my God!"

Again there was a moment's silence. What was Jakob, to intrude his little moralising on such an agony as this?

"Let us have no fine phrases," she said hastily, as if putting them away from her. "I am a religious woman, as you know. Oh, of course, very religious. We grow up in our little creeds, and are very contented

with them, till the moment comes to choose. And then we are at a loss. And we stumble forward; and we fall. There is nothing about my case in the Catechism; and the Catechism is the whole of religion. I have always been taught that."

"Then you have been taught wrong," cried the clergyman, breaking through his reserve at this challenge, and striking out straight from the shoulder. "And you know it, Tante Suze. Religion is the secret of our heart with God."

"Ah, Jakob," said Suzanna, smiling sadly, "you say that because you are not orthodox. But I cannot unlearn the old teaching that was good enough when I was a girl."

"Tante Suze," said Jakob, seeking in vain to steady his voice, "there is a school in which we learn with terrible rapidity. It is the school of adversity. Perhaps God is teaching you in that."

"If so, I understand nothing of the lesson," said Suzanna gruffly.

"Perhaps it is like a diagram on the blackboard, all confusion till the last touch makes it plain."

"I will go back again now," said Suzanna, rolling up her knitting. She rose from her seat. As she passed by the young Dominé, she laid her hand lightly on his shoulder "You are very good to me, Jakob," she said, "and I thank you. But I am too wicked for a good man's help. I must fight out my fight alone."

This time Suzanna's ring was answered with unexpected celerity. Barely had she touched the bell when the door was thrown wide open, and on the threshold there appeared an old gentleman attired in a dingy dressing-gown, which had once been all crimson-petalled flowers. The aforesaid

garment was thrown back from a collarless shirt, and on the old gentleman's head was a nightcap with a hole in it.

"You are late again, Alphonse," began the old gentleman. Then he cried "Ciel!" and banged to the door.

But Suzanna was too quick for him, and adroitly inserted her sunshade.

"Remove that umbrella, madame," said a grave voice from the other side of the door. "There is some error. It is not to me that you destine the honour of your visit."

"I must see the Vicomte de Mongelas, monsieur," Suzanna cried back through the narrow opening, driving down her sturdy parasol. "I have come on purpose from abroad; and my visit is of the greatest importance."

The old gentleman's hold on the door slightly relaxed, but he still kept it almost

closed. "It is a foreigner," he said to himself, "and therefore probably not a dun. It is I, madame," he said aloud, "the Vicomte de Mongelas; but then, see here my dilemma. I am not installed for the visits of ladies. And my toilet—forgive me the allusion"—he pushed the door hard up against the parasol—"is not yet completed. I cannot admit you, and I cannot request you to wait on the landing. What am I to do?"

"I will wait on the landing," said Juffrouw Varelkamp, "till you are ready to receive me."

"But it is impossible." He remained for a moment in thought. Suzanna clung to her parasol. "There is no other way," he said at last. "You are certain that you are desirous to speak to me?"

"I cannot go until I have done so," said Suzanna.

"Madame, I would not think of requesting

you to. Then I propose to you that I let go the door, on condition of your solemnly promising me not to stir from your place till you hear another door close in the passage. Then you will walk in——”

“And wait in the hall,” interrupted Suzanna. “Yes, I promise.”

“*Fi donc*, no, madame. I will leave open the entrance to the humblest of sitting-rooms; and you will, perhaps, have the extreme kindness to wait for me there.”

“I promise,” repeated Suzanna.

“But, pardon,” said the vicomte nervously, “you ladies are sometimes so charmingly playful. Is it a man’s promise or a woman’s?”

“It is a woman’s,” answered Suzanna dauntlessly; “but a Protestant woman’s. I will keep it.”

The religious distinction was entirely lost on the old vicomte, who knew nothing of

Protestants, except that they were people who said they had no sins to confess, but whom you never came across. He hesitated for a moment, then he came to the conclusion that he could risk it, and made a false dart down the passage to see what Suzanna would do.

Suzanna stood motionless outside, without moving her parasol.

Then the vicomte, reassured, fled back to his bedroom, and Suzanna, having heard the click of his door, walked slowly across a narrow passage into the dirty little salon.

The room was poor and neglected, full of tawdriness and dust. Suzanna looked round her, at the faded square of carpet on the unpolished floor, at the red window-curtains, and at a few good engravings on the wall—of Napoleon the Third and his wife, and one or two Bonapartist generals, and also a couple of beauties of more doubtful rank.

And there, on the table, in the middle of the room, stood a large platinogravure photo in a handsome frame, evidently new, of the terrible woman who had destroyed Juffrouw Varelkamp's peace. No need for her to ask whether she had reached her destination. She sank down on a chair against the wall, and waited; but she could not wait long in sight of all that untidiness. She took out a spotless pocket-handkerchief, and began timidly to dust the picture of the woman she hated.

The vicomte, in the mean time, was sitting on his bed in the adjoining room, nursing a lean but shapely leg. His first thought had been, "Has she seen the hole in my nightcap?" He is waiting for an answer to that question still, and he would dearly like to receive one.

Suzanna had seen it. If she had fallen

out of an eighth-story window, she would have seen all the darns in all the curtains all the way down.

But this doubt was not the most pressing of the vicomte's difficulties. The question which required more immediate decision was this one: How am I to appear before any woman, be she ever so old or ugly, now that iniquitous barber has again forgotten to come and shave me in time? First he said, "I cannot do it; I would rather die." And then he said, "It is suicide; but I must."

He dressed himself with his usual scrupulous care. His public garments were always unexceptionable. He put on his frock-coat with the red ribbon in the button-hole, for he detested all oddity in dress, and the absence of the "distinction" would have singled him out among his countrymen. And then he looked at himself once more in the

glass and cursed the barber. Called the barber, I mean. He called him in vain. He called him names.

“Which is worse,” he thought—“to keep a woman waiting, or to go to her with unkempt beard?” The vicomte was an old stager, and he never hesitated in matters of this kind. “To keep her waiting,” he said. And then he took a large black silk neckerchief, and he bound it neatly round his lantern jaws, and in a little knot at the top of his bald head. He had glossy silver hair, neatly curled over the ears, and a fine eagle nose and white imperial. He was a fine-looking old man, and he knew it. Ah, how he knew it! He was a love-bacillus, like so many of his race. One twist of his moustache meant death.

“It is disgusting,” he said, as he surveyed himself in the glass, “like all illness. But it is better than the disgrace of dirt. I have

a terrible toothache. Voilà! The dentist did not make them strong enough."

And so, as it ever is in life, this solemn climax of Suzanna's fate did not want for its "note comique."





CHAPTER IX.

THE VICOMTE'S SCRUPLES.

SUZANNA slipped her handkerchief back into her pocket, and stood up as the vicomte came in.

"Madame," he said, "I am desolated. Accept my regrets. But I am ravaged by the toothache. Yet I could not refuse myself to a lady. Will you do me the extreme honour to sit down?" He handed her a chair as he spoke. And then he winced, on account of the pain he was enduring. "Not a bad face," he said to himself, "not by any means. She must have been pretty some forty years ago. Why the deuce do they ever grow old?"

And why don't the young ones come to see me?"

"My name," stammered Suzanna, "is Mademoiselle Varelkamp. Here is my card. I come to speak to you about your wife."

"My wife!" The vicomte sank down into a so-called easy-chair, and lifted his neat hands in affected dismay. "Les affaires de la vicomtesse! Ah, mademoiselle, you are at the worst address possible. I am the last person to be informed of the affairs of Madame la Vicomtesse."

"If I am not mistaken," continued Suzanna, gaining courage, "you are the husband, monsieur, of that lady whose portrait I see on the table."

"Her husband? But yes. If you will," said the vicomte, smiling. "As little as possible, however. I presume I am still her husband. You could hardly call me her consort. And I am not responsible for the

actions of Madame la Vicomtesse ; still less for her bills."

"I come not to speak of her bills," answered Suzanna. "What she has taken from me she can never repay. I do not expect it. Let me tell you what I wish, and why."

"But certainly, madame," said the vicomte politely, "only, I beg of you, sit down. And let me also implore you to be calm. Ahi, my toothache! There cannot possibly be any cause for excitement in anything that concerns the fate of Madame de Mongelas."

"There is only this——" began Suzanna. "But I must warn you to be patient with my French. It is bad, and I have much difficulty in speaking."

"Madame," said the vicomte, "I will not tell you that I had not noticed you were a stranger, for I never insult by flattery; but I will simply tell you that I took you for a foreigner who had always lived in France."

“A liar,” thought Suzanna; “a flatterer. Let me take care.”

“Monsieur,” she said, “your wife, while travelling in Holland, was upset out of a carriage, and brought into my house. She there made the acquaintance of my nephew, a young student of theology, and she ran away with him. They are now in Italy. They—live together. So much, probably, you know.”

“I?” said the vicomte with an amused face. “I? My dear lady, I know nothing. How should I? These are not the things that you charming creatures communicate to your liege lords by a ‘*mot à la poste*.’ Et après? Do you want your nephew back? I cannot help you, I assure you. I said so before. Be philosophic, madame, and let him stay till he returns of his own accord.”

“I do not want my nephew back,” said Suzanna gravely.

"Not? But that is charming. I perfectly well understand you. Nor do I want my wife."

"Monsieur," said Suzanna, colouring all over her pale face, and up into the roots of her gray hair, "your wife is not with you; she is with my nephew. As you say, she is no longer your wife. You say also that you do not wish her to return. Then why retain a connection which can only be galling?"

"Parbleu!" said the vicomte, "it is unavoidable. Madame is there; and that is all. You would not, I presume, request me to remove by violent means the lady who has done me the honour to share my name? Like the Duc de Praslin, eh?—my august connection. Ah, madame, that is 'moyen âge.' These things do themselves no more. Murder has become so common that gentlemen no longer kill."

Suzanna winced. "I do not mean murder,"

she said, trembling so that the parasol shook in her hand ; “ I mean divorce. Why should you not divorce from your wife ? ”

In his heart the old vicomte deeply represented the question, which showed an unwarrantable interference in his affairs. But he was too polite to pass beyond merely tacit protests. He smiled again. He had taken to smiling since he had bought his new set of teeth. He forgot the toothache he was supposed to have in doing so.

“ Divorce ? ” he said. “ Well, it would be an idea. It is very kind of you to think of it for me. But you forget, madame, that the Church forbids it. I am a good Catholic, and not a follower of that saviour of society, Naquet.”

Suzanna had never heard either of the reintroduction of civil divorce into France by the *Loi Naquet*, nor of the prohibition of any form of divorce by the Romish Church ;

so she stared at her interlocutor for further information.

“Madame,” he continued, “remember that the Church forbids divorce. I could never think of it, therefore, I. The Vicomtes de Mongelas have always gone with the Church.”

“It is your religion which forbids you?” queried Suzanna, groping for light.

“But undoubtedly. And yours—if you permit me?—does it advise you to divorce?”

“It forbids you irrevocably?”

“Irrevocably. It is hard; but we have to obey.”

Suzanna rose slowly from her chair, stumbling forward, and catching at the table as she did so. “Then I have no more to say,” she gasped. “I am sorry I troubled you. I will go.”

“Stay, madame,” cried the vicomte, interested and curious. “Explain to me, if

you will have that graciousness, why this anxiety to rob me of my wife. Is it hate of her? Is it to punish her? Ah, you others, you women, you can hate like—like angels hate vice. Is it because she has carried off the little nephew? If he is a pigeon, she will fleece him. Never mind; the fleeced pigeons fly fastest home.”

“It is,” said Suzanna, standing by the window and looking down at the portrait, “because I want him to marry her. *My* religion forbids wickedness. He loves her; I would have him legalise his love.” This time there was no affectation in the gesture of dismay with which the vicomte threw up his hands.

“Marry her!” he cried. “Is it possible? And what injury has your nephew done to you that you covet for him the succession to the hand of the Vicomtesse de Mongelas?”

“I love him more than anything on earth,”

said Suzanna quietly, "and I am working for his good."

"Madame," retorted the vicomte, "we are speaking in riddles. The matter seems of some importance. Let us understand each other. You are in earnest; is it not so?"

"In dead earnest."

"If I were to die, for instance, there would be a match?"

"Yes," said Suzanna. "But I do not wish you to die. He must expiate, as well as I. Yes, there must be expiation."

"I am, indeed, much obliged to you for your kind consideration. My health is excellent. And now, I take an interest in your nephew who, all unbeknown to me, has usurped my place, and in you also—excuse me—because you are a woman, and unhappy."

Suzanna made a repellent movement.

"Of course, you are insulted by my

sympathy. I do not desire to intrude it. But, madame, I regret most sincerely that you should have taken this long journey in vain. I have never refused any woman anything in reason. I do not wish to refuse you. Allow me, then, to furnish you with some brief information which will cause—not me to refuse, but you to retract your request. Shall it be so?”

He had forgotten his toothache. But he carefully rearranged the black bandage. Suzanna bowed in silent acquiescence.

“When I married Madame de Mongelas, madame, she was a charming young girl of eighteen. She is charming still. She will ever be charming, like Ninon de l’Enclos. She was not my equal in rank, but she surpassed me in fortune. In fact, she was the daughter of an honest wine-dealer of the Quai de—what’s its name? I have really forgotten. It is down there, at the other

end, among the wine-vats. No matter ; nobody ever goes there. Well, she was his daughter, and she brought her dowry ; but she kept it in her own hands, as the bourgeois sometimes arrange matters. It is a vulgar arrangement : no woman of delicate birth would desire it. We lived together very happily for several years. She was charming, as I told you, and—eh bien, I am older—but I was charming too.

“ Madame, would you believe that at the end of those years she became jealous of a common little chambermaid ? She made scenes. No grande dame would have done that ; but there you perceive the wine-seller's daughter. She wished to drive the poor child away ; but I refused to allow her to depart, for she was a good child, and much attached to me. And one day, when I had gone out after one such unpleasantness, I come back in the evening. I see lights in

the drawing-room. I mount. I find my servant half drunk on the sofa, with wine in front of him, and my wife at the piano, singing to him, with flowers in her hair! Ah, mon Dieu, how she looked at me, the little devil! She said nothing but, 'Yes; it is amusing. I agree with you,' and she sailed out of the room. What could I do? I kicked the fellow downstairs that night. It was bravado of hers, but I did not dare to let him go. He would have told far more than the truth all over the city.

"We lived in peace for another week or so—an armed peace. Then, one evening, I took my little chambermaid to one of the smaller theatres to amuse her, for the house was getting dull and my wife treated her badly. We came home; she at half-past ten, I at eleven. My wife was not there. Is it not incredible? She comes back past twelve o'clock with the valet, and she drops his

arm in the doorway, in my sight. 'Was it amusing,' she says coolly, 'at the Palais Royal? Antoine and I, we have been to the Folies Dramatiques.' Could I support it? Could flesh and blood? I thrashed the man within an inch of his life that night. And she left the house next morning. All Paris knew the story in the course of twenty-four hours. I was ridiculous. She had made me so, the vixen. I have never been able to hold my head up since."

"She was guilty?" cried Suzanna eagerly, bending forward in a passion of expectation.

"She was guilty, most certainly. Not, perhaps, as you mean. She was guilty of being—a wine-seller's daughter. Do women behave like that? Are they to account themselves in such matters the equals of men? Emancipation with a vengeance! Ah, there you could see the petite bourgeoisie. She was not accustomed to the

privileges of a gentleman. In her class, perhaps, these matters are treated differently. And now, madame, I ask you, whoever you may be, would you like child of yours to marry such a devil of a woman as that?"

"She was innocent," gasped Suzanna, and fell back on her sofa. "Poor thing!"

The vicomte did not heed her. The recital of his wrongs, long pent up, and now so easily told to a stranger who would disappear out of his life for ever in a few minutes, had pleasantly excited him. He was still very angry with his wife, but he never had an opportunity of saying so.

"She intentionally insulted her husband, and exposed to public scandal the honourable name she was not worthy to bear," he continued bitterly. "Such a woman would be capable of anything. And to think that she is the last Vicomtesse de Mongelas! Madame, as far as I am concerned, I would

be only too glad if you could alter her style and title."

"And after that," asked Suzanna, "during the following years—what has she done?"

"Madame, I do not know. She has lived with her father. When that wearied her, she has travelled abroad. She has spent—or is spending—her dowry. I fancy she has not yet spent it all. But after much good she has probably not been. It is not in her character. A woman who deserts her husband is fundamentally bad."

"And a man, sir, who betrays his wife?"

"Ah, madame, what do you mean by betrayal? The cases are too different to brook comparison. A man betrays his wife by desertion, a woman by unfaithfulness. I had always been a most exemplary husband to Madame de Mongelas. But she—ah bah, n'en parlons plus! God forgive her the wrong she did me, and keep all good men

out of her clutches ! We must marry women, we men, madame, neither angels nor fiends. It doesn't do."

"And you," said Suzanna deliberately, as she again rose to depart, "you who speak thus are the same man who refuses to sue for a divorce on religious scruples. You are like your wife, monsieur, whose conscience does not permit her to eat meat on Fridays, but who devours a human soul whole as a joke."

The vicomte shrugged his shoulders. "Affairs of sentiment will not be discussed, madame," he said ; "it is unprofitable. And, besides, I will not deny that I have still a foible for Madame la Vicomtesse. She is a most fascinating woman. I am an old man, and, by running away from me, she has condemned me to a life of discomfort. I would range myself, if she would return to me. But, alas ! she has no intention of doing

so. This escapade with your nephew is the best proof of that. I must wait for the death of her father, and then we shall see."

"I am glad to have spoken to you," said Suzanna, "but not for such reasons as you think. I leave you with the greater regret that you refuse me all co-operation. Good-bye."

"Madame, the regrets are on my side. Ahi, my toothache! But I cannot do otherwise. To tell you true, among other considerations it is impossible for me to let slip those pecuniary advantages which can still result to me from my union with mademoiselle the wine-seller's daughter."

"Money?" said Suzanna, pausing in the doorway. "How? What?"

"Ah, madame, but you are of a curiosity! Admire, then, my adorable frankness. Money! It is a vile thing. And nowadays, alas! it is a vulgar thing. It used not to be so in the

good old time. When I married Mademoiselle Coriot, her father was very wealthy; he gave her a dowry of a quarter of a million francs, and I was 'galant homme' enough, as I told you before, to allow him to settle it on her. He is less wealthy now, yet I reckon that, when he dies, each of his five children will at least have that sum over again. Madame de Mongelas will, as long as she is married, have need of my assistance in the legal formalities. I have no doubt that she will consent to make an arrangement with me accordingly when the time comes. I am not an utter imbecile. I gave way in the matter of the dowry, when I found the old shopkeeper was obstinate; but we stand on a different footing as regards the inheritance, which I thought would be four times as great, and my pretty viscountess will have to come to terms."

He said all this very calmly, looking

thoughtfully at his finger-tips, as he spread them out before him. Then he drummed them faintly on the table. He had his object in making such confidences. He was wondering whether the money side of the question would prove to have any interest for Suzanna. "She is poorly dressed," he said to himself; "but, then, that proves nothing. The quality of the stuff is good. And she may be stingy, like most old women. My aunt De Monceaux was smothered in millions, and she looked like a beggar woman. She got a franc one day from a benevolent old gentleman, as she sat on a bench in the Bois de Boulogne, and she bought a pair of mittens with it that lasted her three years."

"How much," said Suzanna, still standing in the doorway, "do you expect, sir, that you will be able to extract from your wife?"

She was no longer afraid of him. All her

unwilling respect for the fine gentleman had faded away. And the momentous interview, with its mighty stake, had dwindled into a money transaction.

He, on his side, felt sorely tempted to increase the sum he had in his head. Who could tell what opportunity here presented itself of escaping, once for all, from duns and discomfort, and a fourth-story lodging in Auteuil? But, with his peculiar standard of honour, while he was not unwilling to sell his marriage-tie, he could not, for more than one moment, entertain the idea of extorting money from this woman by false pretences.

"I conclude," he said, "that she ought to let me have half. Yes; the death of old Coriot ought to be worth to me, let us say, a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs."

"And if you had these," asked Suzanna, "you would consent to the divorce?"

“Madame, as I have already repeatedly mentioned,” said the vicomte with dignity, “I have religious scruples. They are very serious. They concern my peace of soul. They should be worth at least twenty-five thousand francs more.”

Suzanna paused one moment to do a mental sum. Then she said, “I offer you one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs. I offer you no less and no more. Will you have them? Yes or no?”

The vicomte scanned her face. “*Je ne marchande pas avec les dames*,” he said. “I will have them. It is agreed.”

“You consent to bring a suit against your wife immediately for divorce? And you bind yourself to assist me, by every means in your power, to effect a marriage between her and my nephew?”

“So be it,” said the viscount; “why not? You are an extraordinary woman, madame.

You know best, undoubtedly, what you are doing; but, if I were your nephew, I should prefer to have another aunt. The sum, by-the-by, is one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs."

"Write it down," said Suzanna, "on paper."

"But, madame, I have never done business with ladies. Appoint, I pray you, some agent——"

"I will do so," interrupted Suzanna; "but give me your promise on paper before I leave this house."

The vicomte had neither ink nor pens in the room. He never wrote anything there, and the few letters he got were addressed to his café. Suzanna tore a page out of a little pocket-book, and the old gentleman scribbled a few lines on it with a pencil.

She went on her way, holding the scrap of paper in her clenched hand.

"At last!" cried Jakob, sick with waiting. "How long you have been! What did he say to you? What is the result?"

"I have been successful," said Suzanna. "We can go back to-night."

It was the last thing the Dominé had expected. He had thought merely to humour her in accompanying her on this wildgoose chase, and the conclusion was a great blow to him.

"Is it true?" he cried. "Is the woman really to be divorced, and then married to Arnout? But he will refuse to do it! It is wickedness! Madness!"

"Hush, Jakob! No, they will not refuse. When she is divorced, they will have nothing but each other. And they will marry. You forget that they love each other. And, if they do not, the guilt will be hers, not mine. I must make it possible for them. I can do no more. But I must do that."

"You are one of God's fanatics, Tante Suze," said Jakob moodily, "but you do the devil's work."

Suzanna thought differently ; for her whole line of argument took its origin from the idea, as we have seen, that Arnout and his companion were already man and wife. Arnout had married a woman who was divorced from her husband, and that would have been a sin, had he known it ; but he had married her in the honest belief that she was a widow, and to marry a widow was not wrong in itself, however unwise it might be. Suzanna felt convinced, moreover, that when her nephew had first entered upon this connection, it had been in the fervour of a youthful passion, without any prior intention of making it a temporary one. In so far, then, his only error had been the not awaiting a religious or civil sanction of his union

—surely a very secondary matter, where moral guilt was concerned. Let him obtain such sanction as quickly as possible, and, whatever may have been the woman's guilt in the matter, his soul might be at rest. Yet even the woman, she now told herself, was right in considering herself already divorced. Only she should have remembered that a divorced woman may not marry again. And yet how many divorced women do it! Is it really forbidden? Suzanna found herself beginning to think more leniently of the Vicomtesse de Mongelas after the story she had heard from the vicomte.

What shall we say of the poor old woman's bitter reasoning, blundering on to the ruin of her own happiness and her nephew's? That it is transcendental, and would lead to mountains of misery which we practical men avoid? So be it. But when she said that

the world would be a better and a purer place, if marriage were not the marriage service, but the marriage-tie, surely we must admit that she spoke the truth. It is impossible? Then, so is Christianity.

And when she did that mental sum before answering the vicomte, Suzanna reckoned out that the sum of one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs represented every penny she possessed in the world.





CHAPTER X.

THE WOMAN'S RENUNCIATION.

“JACKO,” said Madame de Mongelas, lounging before the shaded window, with the full blaze of summer in front of her, “listen to the advice of a woman of the world. Never marry, unless you can do so without falling in love. And never fall in love, unless you can do so without any danger of marrying.”

“I do not understand these subtleties,” said Jacko. “Are there any more chocolate creams or are there not?”

His eyes said it as plainly as if he had spoken. The vicomtesse understood him, and, opening an exquisite little bonbonnière of Saxony porcelain which stood at her

elbow, she threw a couple of sweets across for him to catch.

"You will be ill again, as you were yesterday," she said. "But, after all, it is your business, not mine—at least, as long as you have the grace to get out on to the balcony in time. Every one must know for himself how much he can stand of the sweets of life. And if we get cloyed, so much the better. There is no man so wretched as he whose appetite outlives his teeth."

"Mine are good," said Jacko, cracking away.

"It seems like yesterday," continued the vicomtesse musingly, "that I put that man on the box of a fiacre and drove to the Folies Dramatiques. I still see myself sitting there in the amphitheatre, and him in the pit. What a fever of indignation I was in! I believe I almost loved M. de Mongelas when my father married me to him. It is

a long time ago. And now, this Arnout. What of him? What do you think, Jackanapes, of Monsieur Arnout?"

Jackanapes put his wizened little hand to his heart, as he had been taught to do. The hand held a broken bit of bonbon.

"You cannot get it in that way," said his mistress, sneering bitterly. "Only down your stomach. Heart-love must come from inside. Sweets to the sweet."

Jackanapes blinked his eyes, and followed her advice.

"Oh dear!" she said with a yawn, throwing back her white arms under the luxuriance of her hair, "you are only a monkey, Jacko. It is the last stage of human happiness. Never try to take a step beyond it into the void of originality, for there you are left alone with your despair. As long as you are a monkey, it is all right. *Singe ceux qui t'ont précédé, et ceux qui t'entourent.*

It is the only road to happiness. There is no road to happiness. There is nothing but the pit of happiness, in which sit the happy ones who are too stupid to get out."

At this point Jacko took it into his head to institute a search for imaginary fleas.

"Ah, mais non, merci!" cried the vicomtesse. "After all, I would rather be unhappy. There is a misery that grows out of a frenzy of enjoyment such as the happy people never know. Surely," she added, after a moment, "he might have waited a little longer. Life is short; true, I would not deny it. But, none the less, the night is long enough for our dreams to last beyond one brief upheaval of the breast. When they are happy dreams. When they are happy dreams."

There stole such a look of sadness over her beautiful face, that Jacko noticed it. He carefully laid his sugar-plum on one side,

and then he crept up to his mistress and began softly stroking her cheek with his hairy little paw.

“Jacko,” she said, as she nestled against him, “when it is all over—well over—when the leaf is turned, you and I will remain to each other, and sometimes we will talk it over, and we will tell each other—exactly—how—it—was.”

“And so, for the hundredth time, Arnout, the sooner this business is ended, the better.” Mr. Doyer-Donselaar struck the ashes from his sempiternal cigar. “It is ridiculous for you to contest my right to decide on the subject. And, really, I am acting for your best. I am your father; I am quite willing to acknowledge you as my son. But you must be guided by me in this matter, if your common sense—for the moment—leaves you in the lurch. Tell the lady that the com-

plication has lasted quite long enough, that you are very sorry, but you are recalled to—to Paris, or, better still—to New York, as you soon will be. Pay her, and be off.”

“Pay her!” said Arnout between his clenched teeth.

“Yes. I cannot allow son of mine to remain indebted to any woman under such circumstances. I have put together a reasonable amount in this envelope. Give it her so as to settle the expenses incurred on your journey. Then say good-bye, pack your trunk, and we shall be off to-night.” He thrust the packet into a side-pocket of his son’s coat, who appeared to take no notice of it.

“And if I refuse?” asked Arnout.

“If you refuse, I wash my hands of you. It is all very well to have found a son, but not if you must go and sit with him among the swine. I have no inclination that way,

I can assure you. I have not recognised you yet, as you are aware, so we are both of us still free. You must know what you do."

"I do know," said Arnout as he walked away.

That morning Mr. Doyer-Donselaar had met Madame de Mongelas on the terrace. He had never addressed her as yet; he ventured to do so now.

"Madame," he said, bowing politely, "that is a charming young man, your brother."

"Yes, monsieur."

"It would be a great pity if anything were to happen to spoil his life. He seems to me to be unhappy, dissatisfied. One would say that he is not his own master, and yet desires to be."

"I do not understand you, monsieur."

"I was only thinking that perhaps you,

madame, as his sister, might be able to do something to restore him to that freedom which he undoubtedly covets, and deserves. He will not rest contented long, I am sure. Perhaps it were better to give him what he wants, before he provokes you by asking for it."

"I know perfectly well how to treat my own brother, monsieur."

"I do not doubt it, Madame la Vicomtesse, but I was only wishing to suggest——"

"There is nothing that you need suggest, monsieur."

"But, surely, I have a right to speak, or I would not have ventured to address you. I am his father, madame."

"His father? Indeed! How interesting. But I have nothing to say to his father."

"Yet, madame, it would seem to me——"

"That is my maid over yonder. Would

you have the goodness to call her? I do not like walking alone."

Arnout took Dorothy's letter out of his pocket and read it over again. How often had he not read it already? He knew its few lines by heart. "There is no other way," he said, "and it is the right one. Tante Suze also is right; I never thought I should have understood how right she is—in spite of all." He went up to Madame de Mongelas. As he came in, the monkey darted forward to greet him.

"He has been peering over the balcony for you at an imminent risk of breaking his neck," said the viscountess. "You see, he knows we belong together, we three."

"He knows many things," answered Arnout gravely, as he took the little beast on his arm. "He is a wise monkey, and sees far with those restless eyes of his. I

wish your life and mine were as simple as Jacko's, Dorine."

"Life is simple enough, Arnout; it is only our passions that complicate it."

"I used to think that life was passion, that there was nothing else, and that all the rest was death. I have thought so for a bright, brief period."

"And now?"

"I do not think so now."

"I pity you, Arnout. That is a dream best left undreamed. But those who once have dreamed it should never awake again."

"And you think," he said, "that now I am awake?"

She looked into his eyes. "Yes," she answered mournfully, "you are awake."

"So much the better. Listen to me, Dorine. You will understand me more easily, if you remember that I am awake. We have been very happy together, have

we not? Faugh—la phrase banale! We have been—you know what I would say?”

“Yes,” she answered softly, “I know.”

“And of late we have sometimes quarrelled, like foolish children. Why should we quarrel, Dorine? There is no reason why, that I can understand. Can you?”

“Yes,” she answered, still in the same subdued voice.

“Yes? How do you mean?”

“I think I understand why we have sometimes quarrelled of late. It does not matter. Go on.”

“No, no. I should like to know.”

“There is some proverb about new wine and old bottles. I do not know exactly how it is, but I fancy it would prove appropriate.”

“Hush, hush! That is from the Bible.”

“Is it? I have never read the Bible. Our priests forbid us to.”

"Dorine, I want to leave off quarrelling. I want to be as happy as we once were."

"You will never be that, Arnout. Never in the same way twice. Happier I hope you will be, but it will be differently."

"I want to be it in the same way." He got up from his chair and walked to the window, and stood looking out. "Dorine, I want never to leave you. We must always remain together. I want you to marry me. I want you to—to be my wife."

There was a long silence. He did not dare to look round at her, as she lay motionless on her sofa. Jacko, grown suddenly nervous in the suspense, plucked him by the sleeve. He jerked the little animal away. Would she never speak? At last she spoke.

"That is very kind of you, Arnout," she said, and he fancied that her voice trembled slightly. "More than kind. It is noble. It is worthy of you. It is as I might have

expected of one to whom I have given my affection. I thank you for it in this moment. Will you remember in after years—when you are no longer angry with me—that I sincerely thanked you for it? I shall remember—I.”

“Angry with you? I am not angry with you,” he interposed almost impatiently.

“Yes, you are going to be angry with me soon.”

“I shall never be angry with you, dearest. But answer my question. I have waited for an answer long enough.”

“An answer? But yes, you shall have an answer,” she cried, suddenly changing her tone. “Imagine, Jacko, that it is monsieur who now, in his turn, proposes to me that I should become his wife! First it was our dear aunt, who—not having succeeded in making an angel of me—tried to change me into the next best thing, a Dutch housewife. And now it is you, monsieur! And not you

only. From all sides they are bent on effecting my happiness."

"Am I to understand," asked Arnout, "that you reject my offer with contumely?"

"Arnout, I told you I was going to make you angry. Be patient with me. I owe you a confession. I cannot marry you, for I am not a widow, as I told you I was. I am a wife already. Still a wife. My husband is alive."

Suddenly it seemed to Arnout as if the brilliant landscape in front of him sicklied over beneath a falling veil of pallid green. He shut his eyes to steady himself, and, in doing so, sank down, like one struck, into a chair. The alarmed monkey ran from one to another, and peered up into their faces, and moaned.

"Is it the disappointment of his love?" thought Madame de Mongelas for one eager moment. But she knew it could not be that.

Yet she could not have understood what it really was. She could not, with her so different education and experience, have comprehended what her revelation meant to the Protestant lad, the disciple of Tante Suze, the quondam student of theology. She could not have realised how the folly of his passion suddenly changed in his imagination into the very heinousness of blackest crime. Nor can we reason about these moral issues with logical sequence. It was but a few weeks, be it remembered, since a moment of madness had thrown him into the arms of Madame de Mongelas. At that hour he had reasoned neither of right nor of wrong. Then, as soon as had come the first pricks of compunction, he had told himself that he was bound to her, as he was only too willing to be. And no later deception had altered this his conviction that he owed himself, soul and body, to the woman to whom he had devoted his inno-

cence. Practically, and without much religious or philosophic argument, but trusting simply to the instincts of his honour, he had worked out the problem of his destiny exactly as Tante Suze had done. There was nothing between them but that terrible impulse of crime in the old woman's heart. And even that he could understand better, since he had heard the story of her own life from his father, and knew what full consciousness of horror was hers when she strove by one supreme, though frantic, effort to rescue him from the very edge of the abyss.

He understood it. For he knew now that her whole life had been one long self-renunciation for the holiness of the cause she deemed herself called to defend. He had learned from his father, how that father, not baffled by a first refusal, had repeatedly returned to the charge, and that she, through the succeeding years, had ever met him with the same

unvarying answer: "What have I to do with you? Go back to your wife." And she loved the man whom she thus thrust from her. He could not doubt that she had loved him. How had she not devoted herself to Arnout Oostrum for his father's sake?

He, with the light of these thoughts full upon him, had offered all he had to offer to Madame de Mongelas.

And she? "I am a married woman already," she said. "My husband is still alive."

"There is a wickedness, then," he said to himself, "from which there is no escape."

Madame de Mongelas broke a silence she could no longer endure. "Hush, Jacko!" she said. "Quiet! We make nothing good, child, by moaning. It is only the monkeys who do that. It seems, Arnout, that my dear husband in Paris knows something of

your wishes, or forestalls them. I received a letter from my notary this morning, in which he tells me that Monsieur de Mongelas is about to bring a suit against me for divorce."

"I can understand it," he said sullenly, without lifting his eyes from the floor.

"You?" she cried, blazing out at him. "What do you understand? What do you know? You insult me, and that without reason! Before you ventured to judge of my conduct, you should at least have made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Mongelas."

"I do not——" he began.

"Silence! Listen to me. I am not going to speak ill of my husband. He is as other men. I loved him—sufficiently. That does not matter. They do not take it into account. It is the wife's duty, as the husband's pleasure is to be false. And he—and he—— Go, sir; I forgive you because of your ignorance.

And because you, at least, think honourably, differently. If my husband had thought as you do, Arnout, you would never have known Dorine de Mongelas. The happier for me." She said the last words very softly. Her voice lingered, as it dropped over them. Had he heard them? She fancied not.

"No," she said, "we will not marry. When the first excitement was over, it would be too ridiculous. You and I, we have had our time. It was a good time while it lasted. But it is over. You would be finding out your mistake too soon. I fear me—do you know?—that you have found it out already, before you made it. Well, so much the more beautiful of you. I am proud that you made it. And now we must let it pass over, and pass out of sight. I was just going to tell you, when you surprised me by your proposal, that I must start for Paris as soon as

possible, to find out what is the meaning of this last freak of M. de Mongelas. I was thinking of leaving to-morrow morning, but I think I had perhaps better go to-night. This then, mon cher chevalier, had better be the last time we meet."

He started up. "You desert me!" he cried. "You leave me to myself. To my loneliness. You have robbed me of everything I possessed. And now you leave me—naked and alone."

Dorine smiled! "Always tragic!" she said. "It is in the blood. I leave you to a new-found father—ah, you see that I know—who appears to be very wealthy, and to loving friends who will welcome the prodigal's return. I, now—if you ask to what I return—— But let us rather speak of matters of interest. It is always a sad thing to say good-bye. And now I want you, Arnout, to say good-bye very tenderly

to me. For the future—what is it but a recollection? The past was a hope.”

“I cannot say good-bye,” said Arnout fiercely.

“Yes, you can. For it is the last thing left to say. Good-bye, Arnout.” And she held out her hand.

“It is true, then?” he cried, as if suddenly awakening. “This is a farewell. You dismiss me from your presence, from your life, from your heart? You bid me go—and for good? You are tired of me, and you wish to return to the noble, your husband? It is your answer, madame, to the offer of my whole existence, which I made you a few moments ago? I thank you for the answer.”

“Yes, Arnout, some day you will thank me for the answer. And now let us part friends. Farewell!”

“At least,” he said hastily, “before we separate for ever, you must allow me,

madame, to regulate our business connections." He drew from his pocket the envelope his father had placed there. "You have been so kind," he went on gravely, and without a shade of a sneer in his voice, "to make me considerable advances of money to meet the expenses of our trip. You will allow me, before you dismiss me, to reimburse them, madame." And he laid the packet down on the table.

She grew white to the lips. "You brought this with you?" she stammered. "When you came up to me? I cannot understand."

"No," he retorted hastily. "It is an accident. I had the sum ready. I had just received it. I have long desired—I have always expected to return it."

Madame de Mongelas slowly took the paper in her hands. She opened it, and drew out the bundle of bank-notes it contained.

"The American's money!" she said scorn-

fully. She scanned them carelessly. "It is not even enough," she said with yet more withering scorn.

In his trouble Arnout mistook her meaning. "I deeply regret it," he said, "and if you will only mention any sum you require——"

She lifted her eyes to his face, and, for the first time, their glances met. He stopped. A beautiful crimson mantled over her proud face and neck.

"Here," she said, "Jacko!"

And with an imperial movement of disdain, she flung the bank-notes — in a fluttering bundle—to the ape.

With a screech of delight the little monster sprang upon them. For tearing up tissue-paper was a favourite amusement of his. He jumped out on to the balcony with his precious burden.

Arnout stood by the great window, straight

and still, every nerve in tension with the effort to keep calm, too proud to lift a saving hand, yet not trusting himself even to stir a finger in the yearning to prevent the cruel waste before his eyes. Hanging out on the parapet, against the wide sparkle of lake and sky, in the glowing golden sunlight, the little grey monkey sat coolly tearing up, one by one, the heap of papers he held between his knees, and casting their fragments to the winds. They fluttered for a moment, and then fell, one by one, among the bushes, in the basins of the fountains by the terrace down below, here and there, right and left. Madame de Mongelas lay back upon her sofa, playing listlessly with the glistening jet upon her dress, her eyes fixed immovably on Arnout's face.

She waited till the last scrap had sailed out of sight and Jacko was hunting for more. Then she said: "Go. It is enough."

He moved towards the door. "No," he said; "let us not part thus, Dorine. If I have wronged you, it was not intentionally. Forgive me whatever you have to forgive."

"I will try to," she said proudly.

"I said just now that I was awake. But since then so much has happened. Perhaps I am not awake. I shall understand when that time comes."

"Oh yes," she said, "you are awake. Perhaps, Arnout, if you had still been dreaming—— Good-bye. And, if *I* may say it, God bless you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said, and closed the door.

She sprang after him, as he did so, with an almost involuntary movement, and bending forward, stood listening to his retreating steps. She stood thus for several minutes, after those steps had died away in the distance, and then, suddenly, she sank down

— the graceful, haughty woman — in an attitude of utter abandonment by the door, and, covering her face with her hands, she wept as she had never wept before, except on that terrible evening when she had taken her husband's valet to see a screaming farce at the Folies Dramatiques. The little monkey threw his arms round her neck, and strove to draw the fingers from her eyes and peep into them, but she would not let him. She pushed him away, again and again, so roughly that he at length retired into a corner and crouched there, watching her intently, his face puckered up into a sob.

After several moments, however, she recovered herself in so far that she could push back the hair from her brow. She looked across at Jacko. "You are all that is left of it," she said. "Come here."



CHAPTER XI.

AND THE MAN'S.

WHEN Arnout had sufficiently recovered himself, he went back to his father.

He could not, as yet, understand the experience he had just passed through. With the horror of her confession still fresh upon him, he recoiled from the woman whom he had adored throughout a brief fever of enjoyment, but he was angry with her, none the less, for what he considered her desertion. She was tired of him ; she was going back to Paris, glad, probably, of this valid excuse of her lawsuit. And he?—heroically sacrificing all his hopes and his aspirations, he had flung everything he possessed at her feet.

And she spurned away the treasure with a trip of the toe.

“So she is to leave for Paris to-night,” said his father complacently. “Well, well, it could not be better, all things considered. I am no enemy of diversion, as I have repeatedly assured you. You will not find in me a stern, implacable parent, who has never been a young man himself. No, no; youth must have its fling—I know that. Sow its wild oats, and so on. No, not ‘sow on’—eh? He, he! That was very good. There comes a time for leaving off. And you mustn’t make your furrows too deep, or you’ll never get rid of them. They’ll come out on your forehead. You were very near making a fool of yourself with that woman, Arnout. You really must forgive my saying so. And you may consider yourself lucky that I turned up when I did. Well, you’re

out of it now, and I congratulate you. Take a bit of advice from a man that has seen the world. Love long, and far and wide—but don't love too deep."

"I think, sir," said Arnout stiffly, "that as the matter is now settled, we might more agreeably talk of something else."

"I am most willing to do so," said Mr. van Donselaar pleasantly. "I should suggest that we also quit this place as soon as convenient, and that we go—not to Paris; well, well, never mind—but to Rome. It was my intention, had I found you in Holland and thought you a suitable companion, to propose that we should undertake a journey through Europe together. There is nothing that forms a man so much—unless it be a little escapade like yours. The only difference now is, that you started before me, and that I have had to catch you up. We might go down into Italy, and then try Egypt and the

Pyramids, coming back by the Holy Land and Constantinople. I should like to see 'Jedoodledum.' Wonderful soil for raising *stock*. Only place in the whole world, I fancy, that ever licked New York in the manufacture of business men!"

Arnout did not answer. Here, certainly, was an escape offered to him, beyond his wildest dreams—an escape from himself, and all the misery of his surroundings. To travel had always been one of his fondest aspirations, the fonder, perhaps, because unattainable, as they know who have dined for five successive months at the same *table d'hôte*. And now the full delight of the most splendid of all journeys was opened up to him, in a panorama of expectation before his dazzled eyes. He almost forgot for a moment the dark valley, through which he had just descended. The clouds broke apart, as the darkest clouds are apt to do most suddenly,

and the sunlight of new hope poured in upon his soul. Rome—Jerusalem—Constantinople. Each word called up a new phantasmagoria of the purest, the most beautiful pleasures, untroubled fruition such as he had never experienced yet. He felt that life was not all done for him, as he had fancied ten minutes ago. No; on the contrary, it was only just beginning. It was about to unroll itself before him, in all its variegated delights. It was his world that had been so little. The great world was wide, and full of capabilities, and beautiful still. And the whole deliciousness of wealth was borne in upon his mind.

“Yes,” said his father. “I like you. I am sure we shall get on well together. And I am pleased with you for the prompt manner in which you have put a stop to this little romance, as soon as I pointed out to you that it was working round into a tragedy.

It shows that you are not a duffer, Arnout. There's many a young fellow has seen more of the world that would not have extricated himself so well. You start with your brains in the right place, but you must develop them by experience, and you'll have need of them, if you're to be my heir. There's no man requires to be so wide awake as a rich one, especially in our part of the world. The poor man, if he goes to sleep, risks possible gain, but the rich one, if he does it, risks positive loss. All the same, best be wide awake, any way. I shouldn't have been a rich man now, if I hadn't looked out sharp, when the moment came. And how do you like the idea, Arnout, you pauper, of being heir to a big lump of money all of a sudden? Don't it seem like a fairy tale?"

"I like it, of course," said Arnout. "How should I not do so? It would not be in flesh and blood to prefer being poor."

“No, I should think not. That’s all rot about the pleasures of poverty—

‘Make me contented with my lot,
Whate’er I’ve got or haven’t got.’

It doesn’t do in the nineteenth century, whatever they may have thought out in Palestine, where I suppose a fellow don’t want any clothing and can feel comfortable on an olive a day. Now, olives give me an appetite. And as for Diogenes, it’s all very beautiful, but give me a Dutchman. Our fathers found out long ago, that the only kind of ton* to make a man thoroughly comfortable is the kind they manufacture in Holland, my boy.”

“It takes a long time to produce them in Holland. Are they made more quickly in America, sir?”

“That depends. A sharp man makes

* “Ton,” similar to the English “plum” but in much more general use, is a Dutch expression for a hundred thousand guilders.

them quickly—sometimes. And a dull man never makes them at all. Now, in Holland, any fool can get rich by just sticking on in his father's shoes. Down west, where I made my money, most people's fathers had no shoes for 'em to stick in."

"The experiences must be interesting," said Arnout indifferently.

"I believe you." Mr. van Donselaar crossed and uncrossed his legs, and stretched himself out comfortably. "Yes, my son, I could tell you some rum stories, if I chose. I think you'd find your old father knows what's what. The man must get up early that wants to take me in."

"I do not doubt it," said Arnout. His indifference stung the old gentleman to talk on. He would show the boy what mettle he was made of, that he was not a personage to be slighted like this.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "Now, many

a man would not have availed himself of my opportunity even when it offered. Had I not done so, I should have been poor to this day. Some people would have called it a fluke. It just depends often whether you have the sense to open your mouth for manna where others see merely rain. And we reap a better crop, as a rule, off the stupidity of other people's brains than off the cleverness of our own. Now, *my* manna was a stretch of land that looked just like other land; only, there might have been gold in it, you see."

"And was there?" asked Arnout, watching a bird.

The old gentleman winked, and looked wonderfully knowing. He blew a long, fragrant cloud of smoke into the air. And then he said: "There may have been, and there may not have been. That question remains to be answered to this day."

"But then how did you make so much money by it?" asked Arnout, suddenly observant.

"By *not* looking for the gold," answered Donselaar triumphantly. "It is certain that somebody who peered into the ground, when he had no business to, and when it still belonged to me, came across some bits of ore, and if that somebody bought the ground from me, it was his business to know why."

"How interesting!" said Arnout, sitting up. "I wish you would tell me all about it."

"There is not much to tell, boy. As I said to you, the land was mine, and I didn't quite know what to do with it. I had won it, if you want the exact particulars, at a chance game of euchre in a railway-car. Gold-prospecting costs a lot of money, as you may have heard, and I hadn't any money to sink in shafts. So I waited and 'lay

low,' as they say nowadays. A lot of fellows were loafing round, looking for gold, and some of them came my way and pottered about my bit of property. Well, I watched them, and said nothing, and one day one of them came to me and offered me a good bit of money for my land. He wanted it for sheep-pasture, he told me. I said it would do excellently for sheep-pasture, and he could have it, if he gave me double the sum he proposed. 'Done,' says he like a flash. 'Done' he was."

"That is extraordinary," said Arnout. "What made him pay so heavy a price?"

"Well—as I tell you—he had found gold here and there, when he came fooling around. It wasn't any business of mine whether he would find more. You don't want gold for sheep-pastures."

"But if you knew there was gold?"

"But if I knew nothing about it? I

knew there was gold where he looked. No one better than I."

"I understand," said Arnout, still extremely interested. "It is certainly very clever. You knew that it was where he looked for it, because you had put it there."

"He had no business to come looking for it, wherever it might happen to be. And if he did not find any more, after the land became his, what did that matter? He had bought it for sheep-pastures, you see."

"I see. It is very clever," said Arnout thoughtfully.

"Ah, you have to be clever in that part of the country. There's no alternative but falling into another man's pit or digging one yourself. As to falling into your own pit, you don't catch 'em doing that in a hurry."

"It is very clever," said Arnout abstractedly. "And that was the starting-point of all your good fortune, you say?"

“Naturally. It was only the original capital that I had been waiting for. Once supply me with that, and you could trust me to increase it.”

Another long pause ensued. Such pauses were common between them. At last Arnout said gravely: “I hope, sir, that the original game of cards was fair.”

Mr. van Donselaar laughed heartily—perhaps a little too heartily. “Very good,” he said, “very funny! Oh no, I can make my conscience easy on that score. I have earned my money fairly enough; few men with as large a fortune could say as much. Not that I am wealthy from an American point of view, but I should do for Holland. Oh yes, undoubtedly, I should do for Holland. And so I think my brother Diederick will say, when we get together and have a talk about his Dorothy and you. Yes, though I don’t know her, and though it seems to be

a subject you avoid, I've set my heart, I don't know why, upon it's being Dorothy."

Again there was a silence, and then Arnout got up and said: "I think, if you will allow me, I will go in. Good afternoon."

"All right. Do as you like. Ta, ta! But when shall I see you again?"

"I don't know," answered Arnout, walking rapidly away.

"And we are to decide about leaving either to-night or to-morrow, en route for Rome!"

"Oh, better leave to-night," said Arnout, and turned into the hotel door.

He had three napoleons in his pocket, so much he knew. These coins and his simple gold watch were all the valuables he possessed. How far would they take him on the way back to Holland?

He must get back to his own country, to

a land of honourable men and good women. He must find honest work for his hands to do. He must escape, at all cost, from the world in which he had lost himself, a world where men's loves deserted them, and men's fathers turned out swindlers who owed all their fortune to a lie. He must go home. Had he no longer a home to go to? He must find Tante Suze, and explain himself to her, and intreat her to explain herself to him. All would be clear, if there could but be an explanation—if he could but get back out of the world where things were topsy-turvy, into a world he understood.

He went up into his room and wrote a long and clumsy letter to his father, in which he explained that he could not accept the sonship which had been offered him, and furthermore expressed a regret that he had incurred a debt which he would strive to repay. There had been three thousand

francs in the envelope which Arnout had passed on to Madame de Mongelas. A large sum, and not to be refunded in a hurry, however pleasant it might seem to be able to do so. Arnout took a considerable time over his letter, and then he went downstairs and looked for the director. He had made friends with the director of the hotel, a refined and kind-hearted individual, and he had frequently had a chat with him in his office or out on the terrace. Perhaps the director could help him. He could not do better than try.

“Monsieur,” he said, “I am in a bad dilemma. You must extricate me. I have had—to be frank with you—a tiff with my sister, who is going back to Paris without me. I want to get to Cologne, but I have spent my own money, and I could not think, under the circumstances, of appealing to her. I thought perhaps that you might know of

somebody who was in need of a travelling companion of some sort—some invalid or something, I don't rightly know myself—who would take me a good piece of the way for such services as I could give in return."

"My dear sir," answered the director, "borrow a small sum from me, and repay it when you can."

He was sorry to lose his guests, but he fancied he understood all about Arnout, and he felt anxious to come to his relief.

"No, no," said Arnout, reddening. "You are very good. And I am obliged to you. But I want you to think, or inquire—is there anything of the kind, do you know?"

"As it happens," replied the director, "I heard from my uncle at Menaggio the other day, that there was a young German gentleman there, who is very ill and who was desirous of finding somebody to travel with.

It was only to Frankfort, but that, perhaps, would be sufficient for what you require ?”

“Yes, yes,” said Arnout hastily. “Do you think he would have me ?”

“It is more than a week ago. Perhaps he is long gone. But if he is not, and if he has waited all this time in vain, he might prefer taking your journey upon him to incurring continued expense at the hotel. Shall I telegraph : ‘Companion offers, if expenses paid ?’ It can do no harm to try.”

“Yes, do so, if you please,” said Arnout, striving to be calm. “When can I have the answer ?”

“In an hour or two.”

“That will do capitally. You are awfully good. I am very much obliged to you, monsieur.”

“Ce n’est pas la peine, monsieur. If only the man be not gone !”

Arnout, slipping out of the office and intending to creep upstairs again, ran straight against his father.

“Hullo!” cried the old gentleman, “where are you coming to? Now, look sharp, Arnout. We shall have to decide about this departure of ours. When is it to take place?”

Arnout bethought him of his letter, carefully written. He had it in his pocket. Should he take it out, hand it over, and fly? After all, it was manlier to settle the matter by word of mouth than to write a long vindication and run away.

“Let me answer you, sir, immediately,” he said, as he drew his father into the empty reading-room. “My departure will be as soon as possible, but I think we had better not go together. In fact, after what you have told me this afternoon about the means by which you have possessed yourself of

your fortune, I have resolved not to accept the proposal you have made me. It is not for me to express an opinion on the subject, but I would rather go away."

"But, Arnout," cried Mr. van Donselaar, visibly excited, "you have misunderstood me. It is absurd. It is impossible. Don't you see that I never told the man there was gold? And that I was not responsible for his attempt to outwit me? I treated him fairly enough, and if his little scheme did not succeed, it was merely a case of the biter bit. I had an exceptional fool to deal with, to tell the truth, or the whole thing would have fallen through on both sides."

"You put the gold there," said Arnout firmly. "Don't, pray, let us discuss it. I dare say, from your point of view you were quite right. But I fear we should never agree. I am obliged to you for your kindness. Perhaps I have been too long without

a father, and I dare say you have been too long without a son. It would be no use beginning, only to draw back in a few months."

"We might try, Arnout," said Donselaar, softly.

"No, no ; it would be no use."

"Do you mean that this is really your decision? That for some stupid freak of boyish conceit (for it is conceit) you are going to give up a fortune of twenty thousand dollars a year?"

"Yes, sir," said Arnout.

But old Mr. van Donselaar would not so soon give up his newly found son. He drew him into the embrasure of a window and reasoned with him, pointing out the advantage of wealth and the discomforts of poverty. And he showed him how legitimate, from a business point of view, was the manoeuvre by which the land had been sold.

He was very patient and very plausible. Arnout listened intently. It was a hard struggle for the young fellow.

"I do not deny," he reiterated, "that you may do as you will. But let me do as I prefer, also. And, sir, I prefer not to touch this money. I am sincerely sorry it should be so, but I cannot help it. Discussions are useless. Let me go."

"Then I am really to understand that this is a final decision? You are going away?"

"I am going away."

"And where to, if I may inquire—to Rome alone? Or is there another Madame de Mongelas?"

"I am going back home, sir—alone."

"D—n you!" cried Donselaar, his fury breaking loose. "Go. And where is the money I gave you a few hours ago? Is that to pay for your trip?"

Arnout drew out his pocket-book and produced the letter he had written. He tore it open, and extracting a loose scrap of paper, laid it before Mr. van Donselaar's astonished, but indignant eyes. It was an I.O.U.

"The money is gone," he said. "I am very sorry for it. I cannot repay you, but I shall do so as soon as ever I possibly can."

The pseudo-American took the paper and carefully hid it away in his breast-pocket. He smiled an ugly smile.

"We shall see," he said. "We must hope so. But I fear that this little amusement of son-hunting will prove to have cost me three thousand francs."

"No," answered Arnout moodily. "I do not think so. But I cannot repay you before—before I can. Some day, be sure, you will have your money. Have patience

until then. You can count interest, if you like."

"Thank you," said his father. "You are very good."

At this moment, the director came in with the answer to his telegram. He had received it sooner than he had expected. He held it out towards Arnout.

"If he can come immediately, good."

Arnout laid the telegram before his father. "There, sir, you have my final decision. I have nothing to add to it, but farewell."

"Boy!" cried Mynheer van Donselaar, starting up. "Boy, you are mad! Consider your own future! You are mad! It is impossible!——" But Arnout had slipped away.

"And what, then, is the use of all my money?" said Van Donselaar, clenching his fists before him on the table and staring

down at the I.O.U. with "Arnout Oostrum" sprawling across the paper. He sat motionless for some time, staring thus in front of him. And then he sighed heavily. "D—n the money!" he said.





CHAPTER XII.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

ARNOUT travelled back to Frankfort in attendance on his invalid, and there left him. They were not sorry to part. It had scarcely been a pleasant journey. The German was very ill, and his illness had by no means improved the natural acerbity of his temper. He was one of those who instinctively separate the whole human race into the two classes of superiors and inferiors, the people to whom you must be polite and the people who must be polite to you. And so he unconsciously assumed towards every individual with whom he came in contact the attitude of bully or bullied one. His whole life had

dwindled down into an hereditary conjugation of the verb "to bully" in all its active and passive forms. He was an officer. And as he paid Arnout's ticket, and as, moreover, Arnout represented that object of envious contempt to every well-regulated German mind, a "Dutch bloater," he hectored him as much as the young Hollander would allow.

And Arnout proved unexpectedly meek. The German thought that it was because he was afraid of him, and we need not grudge the sick man this illusion, for it made him supremely happy. But Arnout, never having been in a menial position before, felt unable properly to regulate the degrees of proportion between enduring a man's insolent affability and pitching him out of the window. And he imagined, for so he had always been told in a country where the Germans are both feared and despised, that all Prussian officers were inevitably unendurable. A mistake ; for

when they have passed the age of thirty, they often develop into most charming men, even though they never quite appreciate in political discussions those ideas of mine and thine, of right and might, which are nowadays generally accepted, at least in theory, among most civilised communities. It is too much, perhaps, to expect that from a successful military autocrat in an age of land-grabbing. But Arnout may be easily forgiven his one-sidedness, for his knowledge of these matters was principally derived from a frequent perusal of the *Fliegende Blätter*, the South German comic paper, which brings week after week, hidden away under the form of comedy, a tale of military cruelty and oppression, enough to make every mother in Christendom weep tears of blood. At least, so it read to Arnout; but, then, we must not forget that Arnout came of a nation which has long been impatient of all authority, and

which considers even the preservation of order and security in the public streets an oppression not to be endured.

Unable, then, to establish a proper limit, he calmly put up with his "employer's" impertinences, and remembered that railway trains travel fast. And he was in no mood for further conflicts of any kind. He desired nothing more, for the moment, than repose, to fly back from all things surrounding him, into himself, that in the loneliness now fast forming around him he might find his own heart again. He was angry—angry with Madame de Mongelas, angry with his father, angry with Dorothy, angry even with Tante Suze, though here his anger was fast breaking up into a yearning for reconciliation in their mutual guilt. But, above all things, he was angry with himself, and the terror and disgust which the knowledge of his mistress's secret had brought upon him still held him

as in a vice. He loathed himself and the deed he had done, but it was with scornful, bitter loathing, rather than repentance. He was angry with himself for being angry. He did not want to be it, neither as regarded the others nor as regarded himself. The world was out of joint, and what was he to set it right? And yet, what was he, either, to break the laws of Heaven and earth? He must get back, back on to the rails, if possible. He sat in the train, staring out into the swiftly shifting landscape with hard and hopeless eyes. What did it matter to him if the German grumbled because he had not arranged the cushions aright?

And, then, gradually, softer thoughts came over him. They came with the constant memory of Dorothy, the cruel maiden who had driven him to his ruin. He had ever loved to think so, and yet the idea would not let him rest. Was it true that she

had really been to blame? We are always willing to hold others responsible for our sorrows—it is pleasant; but can we truthfully convince ourselves that they sin in our sins? And Jakob te Bakel's words in the Cologne Cathedral echoed once more through the deepest recesses of his heart: "She loves you, and you have deserted her." They had never been completely silenced since that day when first they were spoken.

He must get back on to the rails again. But how? Time must show him, and he must try to understand. All these difficulties and distractions, these wrongs and rights, were too puzzling and irritating, like a tangled skein. Best get away from the unusual, escape into the everyday.

The career in the Church, which was to have been his, was now closed to him. Concerning that, he was resolved. He did

not doubt that people would condone his fault, describe it as a boyish infatuation, advise him to live it down, and to prepare for a life of usefulness in the ministry. But he would not listen to them; no, not for a moment. His mind was made up. His own horror of himself was too vivid to allow him to hesitate. Long enough had he lived a lie. And whatever change the future might bring in his convictions, to become a teacher of the Gospel, a pattern and a testimony—no.

He must try to obtain a situation as a clerk in Amsterdam. The idea was unpalatable to him, but he embraced it with energy. In his talks with his father he had felt that he might perhaps develop a certain aptitude for business, for honest business, manly business, the hard-working strain to make fair profit, and to make it frequently. It was all very vague as yet, but he would try, and

see what came of it. He was too old to begin ; well, he must not rest content to be backward longer than necessary. He saw himself, in his imagination, tied down to a desk, day after day, from morning to night, scribbling figures. The prospect was not very inviting, but he accepted it. For one resolution rose paramount in his mind over all other thoughts. He must never be dependent on Tante Suze again. Never, never on any one. He must earn his own bread. And he must repay the debt he had contracted towards his father. His cheeks burned as he recalled the beneficence of Madame de Mongelas.

His thoughts of the future were very sombre ones. He did not much mind their being sombre. It would be too much to say that he revelled in it, but he accepted the fact with a grave sense of the fitness of things.

Ah, well, we are strange discords, and the ground-tone is always self.

Had he been more presumptuous and seen clearer, he might perhaps have discerned, in the gloom of things that are, a great house in the coffee-trade, left under the guidance of an old man, wearying for his rest in the country, and of a young fellow who plays the violin too well for an office desk—and, in the brightness of things to be, a modest post in that house for a man able and eager to work his way upwards, to whom the old chief of the firm has said: “When you gave up that fortune acquired by falsehood you did a great and noble thing, a thing which every true man of business would delight in, and for which I, whose every penny was honestly got at, honour and love you. But we cannot have what we let go. The years alone slowly bring expiation, and when you earn enough by your own exertions——”

The dream fades away, even as we dream it, and Arnout, looking out into the awakening morning, sees himself with industrious eyes, and brow on which sorrow has left its mark, at work at his office-desk.

He reached the little Wyk station late in the evening ; he had purposely timed himself so as to avoid the tell-tale light of day. He was almost penniless. His money had barely sufficed to bring him on from Frankfort third-class.

He slipped from the carriage and, avoiding, as well as he could, the few lights of the station, he hurried away down the deserted road. It was not that he was full of false shame ; he would be willing, when the time came, though scarcely without that shrinking which is only natural, to confess his guilt before men ; but first, and before all things, he must get back home, get into the old

surroundings, and if he could only become his old self again, then, surely, he would understand.

As if we could ever do so ! As if Arnout Oostrum, of all men, would ever be his old self again !

His heart leaped with a strange medley of feeling at the thought that in a few moments he would once more stand face to face with Tante Suze. Between them would lie, like a barrier, the constant thought of her crime and of his. Both had explanations—ay, and expiations—enough to fall back upon, but, even if these sufficed for the other, they would not suffice for the one who could appeal to them. How would they meet ? And what could he say to the woman who had loved him with such an all-absorbing love, and who, like him, had erred, and erred in vain ? He could find no answer to the question, however often he pondered it. Yet

he felt that he must get back to her. The sooner, the better. And he hurried down the lane.

He turned the corner, by the jasmine-bushes, from whence, by daylight, you could discern the house. It was too dark now to do so—a soft, still darkness, without wind or stars, the very melancholy of night, lay lightly on the trees. He ran forward now, borne onward by the tempest of his own uncertainty. The next moment lay before him as a vast black question, the answer to which would embrace, so it seemed to him, in a sudden clearness, both the future and the past. He ran onward. Then, in the darkness, the white shape of the house became vaguely visible. And he stopped, when he saw it, smitten with a sudden hesitation, a nameless dread. A foolish inclination came over him to run back—to the other end of the world—never to come

near the place again. And then he conquered, with an effort, what was left in him of false assumption and walked on with firm tread to the gate.

The little cottage was dark. He tried the latch, but it would not work. The gate was locked. He looked up at the forlorn windows in amazement; never, as long as he could remember, through the fifteen years they had lived together, had his aunt spent a night out of the house. Yet now, surely, she must be away. He shook the inoffensive gate repeatedly, in his anxiety and his disappointment. For he suddenly realised, with all the vehemence of failure, how his whole nature had been strung up for this meeting. He could not bear the recoil now that the tension was unexpectedly relaxed. He stumbled miserably along the neat box-hedge in the darkness, and lifted his eyes from time to time towards the dark line of the building, and wondered.

The window of his own little room shone out, curtainless, with a black shimmer in its glass like that of deep water under a lowering sky. The house looked down upon him, as if big with a secret it was striving to tell. And the night was soft and still.

And then he saw, what he had not seen till now : a board stuck upon a pole in the middle of the central geranium-bed which adorned the garden-plot.

He could not make out what was written upon it ; and yet only one thing, he felt, could be written up thus. He jumped over the low gate and ran to the post. He drew matches from his pocket, and, striking a light, he read by its momentary flash the words he expected yet dreaded to find—

“TO BE LET OR SOLD.”

He dropped the match from his hand, and it seemed to him as if, in the darkness, he were standing by an open grave.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATTED CALF.

It was many minutes before Arnout roused himself to turn away. Then he shook himself, like a dog awakening from sleep, and crept back to the gate, and slowly climbed over it.

During all those minutes a figure on the other side of the road, under the shadow of the trees, had stood watching him with quiet expectation. And as he let himself down on the other side of the gate, Jakob te Bakel stepped forward and laid a hand on his arm.

“Arnout,” he said, “she isn’t dead. You may thank God she is not. Come home with me, and I will tell you all about it.”

Arnout suffered the other to lead him down the lane towards the parsonage. They walked on in unbroken silence except for one interchange of rapid question and answer.

"Is she ill?" said Arnout.

"No," answered Jakob, "she is not ill."

Arnout did not speak again till they reached the parsonage door, but then, as Jakob limped aside to let him pass, he stopped.

"I will come with you," he said, "but not if you preach to me, against your own conviction. You may reproach me as much as you like, Jakob, but it must be Jakob te Bakel who speaks, and not the Dominé. Don't think me unkind, Jakob, but I can't listen to set phrases. Not to-night. I am unreasonable. But I am trying to understand."

"I shall not preach to you," said Jakob sternly; "come with me." And they went in.

He made the wanderer as comfortable as

he could, materially, but there was a reserve in his manner which struck a chill to Arnout's heart. The minister could not forgive his former friend immediately, and be kind to him and take him to his heart as if nothing had happened. Something had happened. It was impossible to ignore it. It would be reprehensible to do so. The women would probably make enough of the prodigal, and pet him, and feast him. Women always dearly enjoy a sinner, even when he is penitent. But he, the parson, was not going to give way to any such false sensibility. Men are made of robuster impressions, and their feelings can outlive many a change of front. Iniquity was iniquity, and must not be called virtue because we happened to find it in a repentant soul. Better than speak such falsehood, keep silence and go your way. And Jakob, whose heart was overflowing with pity for the prodigal, fastened

down his face into severe lines of what he thought was neutrality, and set bread and meat before him without a word.

But Arnout pushed them away. "Tell me," he said, "what has happened to her?"

And Jakob told him the story of their journey to Paris.

"And so," he concluded, "when we came back, the first thing that she did was to look for a situation as housekeeper. She has found one—in Amsterdam. She preferred Amsterdam, so as to be near Dorothy; for false pride she has none. It is evident, of course, though she refuses to answer any questions, that she has sacrificed what money she had to the Vicomte de Mongelas to obtain what she calls your soul's salvation. It is a madness, and I have ceaselessly told her so; but it is one of those madresses which make the angels weep, even more than they cause devils to grin."

Arnout had sat silent under the torture which the other was inflicting, neither by preference nor unwillingly, but as men do remorselessly what cannot be left undone. After some moments he said—

“And Miss van Donselaar—did I understand you to say she was in Amsterdam?”

Then Jakob told him why Steenevest was empty too. The lamp burned low. They sat opposite each other; Arnout with the untouched meal beside him, Jakob with his eyes fixed intently on the bowl of his long Gouda-pipe. Their hearts were very near to each other—and very far apart.

“Do you know,” said Jakob presently, “that your aunt Barsselius is dead?”

“No, indeed!” answered Arnout, starting up. “How should I know? When did she die?”

“She had a fit of apoplexy last Monday, and died almost immediately. She has left

very little money behind her, for everything goes back to her husband's family. But what she could dispose of, she has bequeathed to Miss Adelaida Vonk for the maintenance of her dog Bijou. She made a new will, it appears, on the day after Tante Suze had started for Paris. She was very angry with us all for not having effected your return."

"Well," answered Arnout, "I can't help it. I am sure I never wanted her money. And, besides, she was no aunt of mine."

Poor Tante Suze! She also was no aunt of his. And yet, if her sister had withheld from her the little money she had to bestow, it was through his fault, and his alone.

"We will go to Amsterdam to-morrow," said te Bakel, amid the weary silence. "We will go together and find Tante Suze."

"Yes," answered Arnout dreamily. "I must speak to Tante Suze. We will go to Amsterdam"

He was miserable, utterly miserable and worn out and confused. He looked across at Jakob te Bakel's long pipe and stern face. He shivered. The room seemed cold to him. And the lamp burned strangely low.





CHAPTER XIV.

ARNOUT UNDERSTANDS.

MEJUFFROUW Varelkamp sat in her neat little housekeeper's room. She had obtained a situation immediately; indeed, with her references and accomplishments, a number of applications had come to her as soon as her purpose became known. She had decided to fix her choice on an elderly maiden lady, like herself, an invalid, to whom she could be housekeeper, nurse, and companion combined. And she was not unhappy among her new surroundings, as long as she had plenty to do; her occupations took her away from her less agreeable thoughts. She knew that she was not sorry it should be so,

even while she sought to return to them. And, moreover, the object for which she strove was about to be attained. She dreaded success, and, probably, when it was achieved, she would regret it. But as long as she was working for it, she rejoiced in the word.

This morning's post had brought her a couple of letters. They were spread out before her; she sat gazing at them even now. The one was written in a graceful feminine hand, and its contents ran as follows :

“ MADEMOISELLE,

“ I send you back your boy. Do not question longer why I retained him, or why I send him back. He is willing to return; let that suffice you. And I am not unwilling he should go. I can feel with you, for I also have learnt something of the bitterness of loss. I return to my husband, and

you will hardly, I presume, insist, under these circumstances, on my marriage with Arnout, for I cannot suppose that your unbending morality will approve of two husbands any more than of half a one. Two ! It would be too droll ! And M. le Procureur Général would lock me up for bigamy, and then I should have none. Adieu, mademoiselle ; forgive me the wrong I have done you. Be sure that we suffer for our evil actions ; and, sometimes, in those austere Protestant prayers of yours, which seem made for human sin, but not for human folly, remember the name of

“ DORINE DE MONGELAS.”

The second consignment could scarcely be called a letter. It was a parcel which had come by letter-post. On being opened, it had revealed, under a thick paper covering, a bundle of one thousand franc

notes, and of bills of exchange from one commercial house to another, which had been done up in a lump and flung into a letter-box, like so many worthless pages of gossip. The sum entrusted to the honesty of the post in this happy-go-lucky manner amounted, when everything was counted up, to exactly one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs. There was no letter of explanation of any kind, not even a name, or a pair of initials. The postmark on the wrapper was "Paris;" the direction was written in an unknown hand. The money lay in a heap on the table—and that was all.

Mejuffrouw Varelkamp sat looking at it, and counting it over, but she was not thinking of the money—she was thinking of the letter. She wore mourning for her sister, but it was not that only which made her face look even paler and thinner than usual.

The letter was a great trouble to her. It

had come upon her unexpectedly. It was heavy with a revelation, from which her soul shrank back, because of its pain and its reproach.

This woman, whom she had attempted to kill—this woman wrote to her, and wrote thus. In the very midst of all Suzanna's scheming to bind Arnout to her, she resigned him ; she resigned him because she knew that it was wrong to retain him—resigned him in the sacrifice of her love for his sake. For Suzanna, looking deep down into the letter, read her story there, and read it right. The money lay there also, but what availed the money ? In the moment when she touched success, Dorine de Mongelas had flung it from her because she would not have it at the price.

This truth Suzanna faced as she was accustomed to face truths, unpalatable or otherwise, and try to live them down. She

idealized her rival undoubtedly, as it was her nature to do, when once she veered round ; and many circumstances of the case were as yet entirely unknown to her. But in the main idea, that the woman whom she had striven to injure so terribly was treating her with great generosity, she was certainly right.

“ She is a better woman than I,” she said ; “ she, the wicked creature, is a better woman than I. She lived more truly, more straightly than I. I love him, and I have been working hard to mould his lot as I thought best. And whether the means be right or wrong, what has it mattered to me as long as I could have my own way, and do as I thought best? Yes, that is what it has always been. As I thought best. Even murder, if I deemed that it would attain what I thought best. And if I thought my best was better, then the world was mad, and God was wrong. And what has my

wisdom led to from the beginning? I have built up with all my labour the very things I desired to destroy. It was I who sent the lad forth from his home in the very moment when I was yearning to retain him. And it was I who was welding the chain which must fetter him for ever, at the moment when this woman was loosening it to let him free. Oh, the unwisdom of our wisdom when it begins to doubt of conscience, when it tells us and reasons out to us that evil is not evil because it leads to good! Oh, the wretchedness of going wrong!"

She sat for a long time undisturbed in the silence, alone with her thoughts. Then she got up from the table and went to a little cupboard in a corner, and took up a Bible which lay there.

She opened it at the fifty-first Psalm, and she read the Psalm through solemnly, without flinching.

During all these troubled weeks she had calmly continued her reading, but she had shrunk, with a nameless feeling of terror, from that agonized cry of the repentant King of Israel. It was the Psalm which Arnout had whistled on the summer evening when he wandered down the lane, and came upon the carriage upset in the middle of the road. She shrank from it ; from the tune, from the words, from the awful, overwhelming, " Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God ! " And now, with its meaning sinking deep into her spirit, with all the reminiscences of that fateful evening returning upon her, she read it through sorrowfully, calmly, from end to end. She was sitting with the open page before her, when Dorothy van Donselaar came in.

" Do I disturb you, Tante Suze ? " said Dorothy.

" No, child, no ; and I have great news

for you to-day. Can you bear good news as well as evil? Madame de Mongelas has left Arnout, and I doubt not but now he will soon return home."

Dorothy smiled upon Tante Suze, but it was a very subdued smile. And a question remained in her eyes, which the old lady hastened to answer. "She has gone back to her husband," she said. "Poor thing! She has gone back to her husband."

"I am very glad for your sake, Tante Suze," said Dorothy gravely, "that Arnout is coming home. Very glad. I looked in to tell you I have found a good situation for Betje, in the house of a minister who preaches damnation and makes the best of this world while it lasts."

"That is good news also," said Juffrouw Varelkamp, "for it has been very kind of you to take so much trouble about Betje. She will be in such a congenial atmosphere there,

that she will refuse to return to me if ever I should have need of her again." She did not press Dorothy. There are things best said by being left unspoken.

But presently she pushed the book towards her, pointing to the open page. "Child," she said, "it is an awful thing to live through the experience which makes such words possible, but—oh, child, it is a blessed thing, when such words can follow on such a deed."

"It is Arnout's psalm," said Dorothy softly. And then, in the silence, the two women kissed.

"There is a gentleman to see you, juffrouw," said a maidservant, breaking in upon them. "He won't give his name, but he says that you know him, and he is coming downstairs."

Suzanna and Dorothy looked at each other. They knew who the stranger was.

And before any explanation could be offered, Arnout walked into the room, and, pushing out the servant, closed the door.

Then he stood at the far end of the room, unwilling to advance, hesitating what to do or what to say, troubled even more by the unexpected sight of Dorothy van Donselaar, standing against the window by the side of his aunt.

Suzanna came forward a few paces, and then checked herself.

"Don't come near me," he cried. "I am not worthy. It is so strange, and things all turn out as they should not, and we cannot put them right. But I am not worthy. I shall never be worthy again, neither of you, nor of her!"

"Oh, Arnout!" burst forth Suzanna; "oh, the wretchedness, the wretchedness of going wrong!"

He hesitated one moment, with his eyes fixed upon her face.

“The wretchedness,” she went on vehemently, “of thinking, despite all our conscience tells us, that right can be wrong and wrong be right, because our reason, or our passion, deems it so! Oh, the misery of living false!”

And then, suddenly, Arnout understood.

He sank down on his knees, and stretched forth both his arms towards her, out into the void, into the future, nay, into the very present of love.

“I am not worthy,” he cried, “nor of you, nor of her, nor, least of all—of God’s mercy. Back into the right path. Into the right path. By Thy strength, O Christ!”

THE END.

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